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OR
THE BLACK WATCH IN EGYPT



BY JAMES GRANT

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HOGGE'S HONEY COMPANY, Limited,
12, GREAT EASTERN STREET, E.C.

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ROYAL HIGHLANDERS

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JAMES GRANT

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR'

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

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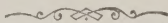
James Grant (1812-1886), popular novelist, was born at Edinburgh. This novel treats of the British Expedition to Egypt, when the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir was fought. It must have been written near the close of the author's life, whose death took place in London a year later than the date given above.

RECENT NOVELS

BY

JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR.'



THE DUKE OF ALBANY'S HIGHLANDERS.

THE CAMERONIANS.

THE DEAD TRYST.

THE SCOTS BRIGADE.

VIOLET JERMYN; OR, TENDER AND TRUE.

JACK CHALONER.

MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

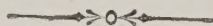
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THE ROYAL HIGHLANDERS.



CHAPTER I.—STALKING THE DEER.

‘I DON’T know what Olive will think, or how she may view my loitering here, after all these years of absence, instead of hastening home to meet her ; but, truth to tell, the temptation to have a shot on the purple heather after sweltering so long in India was so great——’

‘What does it matter what she thinks?’ interrupted the elder man, laughing. ‘When two persons are to spend the whole term of their natural lives together, they can surely spare a few days for pleasure apart!’

‘But, consider, I have not seen my little *fiancée* for seven years.’

‘You will find her a pretty tall *fiancée* now,’ replied the other, ‘and as handsome as any girl in Scotland, Allan.’

The speakers were Lord Aberfeldie (he was viscount in the Peerage) and his son Allan, the Master, then at home on leave from the Black Watch, in which he was a captain ; and now, side by side, they were creeping up a steep and stony corrie in search of the red deer, but paused for a few minutes to breathe and converse.

The Master—so entitled as the son of a Scottish baron (we may add for the information of most English readers even in these days)—was, like his father, a tall and soldier-like fellow,

with closely shorn dark brown hair, straight features, and an almost black moustache, which partly concealed lips that were handsomely curved, and expressive of no small degree of firmness and decision. He carried his head erect, and spoke rather with the air of one used to command when addressing men, but with great and subtle softness when conversing with women of every station and degree ; and already, under home influences, his dark hazel eyes were losing the keen and somewhat hawk-like expression they had worn when daily facing death and suffering on active service.

Both father and son were handsome, though there were nearly thirty years between them in age, and both were, from head to foot, unmistakably thorough-bred men—the latter tanned deeply by a tropical sun, and his forehead scarred by a wound from a tulwar blade.

Lord Aberfeldie, now above fifty, had taken a turn of service for a few years in the Black Watch till his succession to the title required his presence at home, though an enthusiastic soldier ; and soon after his place in the regiment which he loved so well was taken by his only son and heir, the Master, then fresh from college.

Father and son both wore plain shooting-kilts and jackets of coarse heather-coloured stuff, with handsomely mounted sporans and skeins ; other ornaments they had none, unless we except the crest of Graham—their surname—an eagle taloning a stork, in their glengarries ; and the peer, who was a keen fisherman, had his head-dress further garnished by various flies and old fish-hooks.

When *en route* home to the family seat at Dundargue, in the Carse of Gowrie, the Master had been tempted by his father to join him at their shooting-box among the lovely Perthshire hills, where, at present, the party consisted of only four—Mr. Hawke Holcroft, an English guest, and Evan Cameron, a sub. of the Black Watch, also on leave ; and these two, attended by

a keeper and gillies, were creeping up another corrie, rifle in hand, about half a mile distant.

'You have had this—a—Mr. Holcroft with you for some time at Dundargue?' said Allan Graham questioningly.

'Yes—for some weeks—before we came up to the hills here.'

'He cannot know anything about the implied engagement—that of Olive Raymond with me?'

'Implied?'

'Well—the peculiar arrangements that exist under her father's eccentric will.'

'Probably not—nay, undoubtedly not,' replied his father, eyeing him keenly; 'it is no business of his—so, whence the question, Allan?'

'Because he showed me, rather vauntingly, a very fine photo he keeps in his pocket-book.'

'A photo of Olive?'

'Yes.'

'The deuce he does. I have thought her sometimes too *épris* with our horsey friend, Hawke Holcroft, and thus longed for your return. They renewed at Dundargue an acquaintance formed last season in London, when Olive made some sensation, I assure you; and, now that you have seen her photo, what do you think of her—pretty?'

'Pretty! She is downright beautiful!'

'Ah—wait till you have seen her. She does credit to your mother's rearing and her governess's tutelage; but you have not exhibited much impatience hitherto. Gad, when I was your age——'

'You forget that she was such a child when we parted,' interrupted Allan, stroking out his long dark moustache. 'But was it not rather cool of him to show *me* her likeness?'

'Perhaps; but then it was done in ignorance of the situation, and it is probably the result of some conservatory flirtation.'

‘But, just as he showed it to me, was it not strange that I heard the cry of a plover overhead, and——’

Lord Aberfeldie interrupted his son by a hearty laugh, and tossed away the end of his cigar.

‘After eight years’ soldiering with the Black Watch, do you actually retain the superstition that the plover is a type of inconstancy, and the bird of ill-omen Burns, Scott, and Leyden describe it as being?’

Allan laughed too ; but now, when among his native mountains and the scenes of his childhood, he could not help old Scottish impressions returning to him, though certainly the ranks of his regiment were the last place in which he was likely to forget them.

The silver-haired and silver-bearded old gamekeeper, Dugald Glas (whose real name was Mackinnon), a hawk-eyed Celt, with a weather-beaten visage, and bare knees that were brown as mahogany, now urged silence and no more smoking. He had discovered, by the aid of his binoculars, a couple of deer grazing, but pretty far apart, upon the hill-side ; and once again by private signal the two parties began mutually their stealthy approach upward in the two corries that concealed them in the *forest*, for so it was called, though destitute now of trees.

‘A forest, as the word was strictly taken in ancient times, says Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, ‘could not be in the hands of anyone but the king ; yet, in later periods, forests have become the property of subjects, or have been erected by them, though without being protected by forest laws. The royal forest in the Isle of Wight, in which there is not a single tree, is not the only English example remaining of the view taken of this old meaning of the word.’ Hence, he adds, ‘Let not the Cockney suppose that the word forest necessarily implies a district covered with oaks, chestnuts, or trees of any other description.’

A powerful and gigantic staghound, wiry, sinewy, and iron-

grey—the noble dog that Landseer loved to depict—saw the deer already without the aid of glasses and strained hard upon his leash, an iron chain, which was twisted round the muscular wrist of the old keeper, who soothed and patted him, while muttering in Gaelic, ‘*Mar e Bran, is e braithair !*’ (If it is not Bran, it is his brother), alluding to Fingal’s favourite staghound, which he was thought to resemble, as his hair was iron-grey, his feet were yellow, with erect ears of a ruddy tinge.

The forenoon was brilliantly clear, so the deer-stalkers had not the weather to contend with, as that, if untoward, may render all strategy vain.

Lord Aberfeldie and his son were as well aware as their skilled old keeper that in stalking the chief things to regard are the eyes and nose of the deer. His vision, quick as that of an eagle, can detect a human head above a ridge of rock or belt of bracken, and he can scent an intruder on his ‘native heath,’ if the breeze blows *from* the former, at a wonderful distance ; and old Dugald Glas, who had brought the father and son to the forest at dawn with as much care and secrecy as if an assassination was in hand, had long scanned the vicinity with his glasses before he discovered the stags in question, and gave the concealed stalkers the signal to approach them.

The two animals were rather far apart ; both were quietly feeding, and—as the season was considerably advanced—both in colour were marvellously like the grey stone and brown heather around them, and both were, as yet, all unalarmed as Lord Aberfeldie, the Master, and Dugald Glas, while pausing and holding ever and anon a council of war in low whispers, crept up the stony corrie, keeping carefully to leeward of the quarry they had selected, leaving Cameron of Stratherroch and Hawke Holcroft to approach the other as best they might ; but it was in the present instance absolutely necessary that both parties should fire at the same instant, or one of the stags would vanish at a gallop, perhaps to the most distant limit of the forest,

In crawling after such game the head must be foremost when going up a hill, and the feet foremost when going down, and the stalker must creep on his stomach and knees ; and all this, when done in the kilt, over rough rocks, sharply pointed heather, and mossy bog, is not to be effected without considerable toil and even discomfort.

Nearly an hour of this kind of work had gone on, the father and son creeping side by side, softly and in silence, dragging their rifles after them, old Dugald following in the same fashion, with Bran straining on his iron chain ; and once or twice they had actually to traverse the bed of a mountain burn that brawled hoarsely downward over its brown-worn pebbles and boulders.

The stag was still feeding quietly, and all unconscious of the approach of death ; and the stalkers were, they thought, within a safe distance now, and that it could not escape them ; so Dugald Glas dropped behind, after whispering to the Master in Gaelic,

‘Blood upon the skein, Allan !’

Then the heart of the latter began to beat highly as the moment for shooting drew near, for after all their care and toil it was quite possible that a grouse might whirr up from the heather, and with a warning cry scare the stag to full speed.

‘You take aim, Allan,’ whispered Lord Aberfeldie, ‘and I shall reserve my fire. It is years since you had a shot at a dun cow, my boy.’

Inch by inch the Master cautiously inserted his double-barrelled rifle between the stiff tufts of purple heather that fringed the bank of the hollow up which they had been creeping, and brought the sights to bear upon the beautiful and graceful animal that cropped the herbage, with his branching antlers lowered ; and Allan, in the excitement of the moment, felt his pulses beating wildly.

‘If I miss—if I fail !’ he muttered,

‘Tut—there is no such word as fail!’ replied his father, unconsciously quoting Richelieu.

Allan drew a long breath, while his dark eye seemed to flash along the barrel, and fired. Bang went a couple of rifles in the distant corrie, but Aberfeldie and his son took no heed of them. The latter’s single shot had sped true, piercing the stag above the left eye, and now it lay prone on the heather, tearing up tufts and sandy earth with its hoofs in the agonies of death.

Allan’s skein-dhu was promptly in his hand; the stag was *gralloched*, and Dugald Glas, waving his bonnet, shouted loudly for Alister Bane and Hector Crubach (or lame Hector), two gillies, to bring up the pony, on which the dead animal was slung, and then the party set out for the place appointed for luncheon, as mid-day was now long since past.

‘What the deuce are Stratherroch and Holcroft about?’ exclaimed Lord Aberfeldie, while shading his eyes with his hand; and to their success in sport we shall refer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.—HAWKE HOLCROFT.

THE process of creeping in serpent fashion over sharp-pointed heather, rough stones, and occasionally in the bed of a mountain stream, as we have already described, proved intensely tiresome, and distasteful to a ‘man about town’ like Mr. Hawke Holcroft, who could not entirely conceal his genuine disgust thereat, and at the slowness of the whole affair, though reminded by Dugald’s son Angus, a smart young under-keeper, of the big hart of Benmore, which was stalked for seven long summer days before it was killed.

‘But, for the Lord’s sake, sir, keep quiet,’ whispered Angus. ‘We are now close on one of the finest of Macgilony’s dun cows.’

‘I see no dun cow!’ grumbled Holcroft,

'He means yonder deer,' whispered Cameron, a fair-haired and pleasant-looking fellow. 'Macgilony was a famous hunter in the olden time, and his dun cows, as he called them, were the red deer of the Grampians.'

But to Holcroft, whose idea of hunting the stag was to have a scared and bewildered creature—a fallow deer, fed on oats and hay, perhaps—cast loose from a game-cart in a smooth grassy park, the perseverance, courage, and labour required for stalking in the Highlands seemed a simple waste of time and an inconceivable bore.

'Stop for a minute,' whispered Angus, as they crept *up the wind*; 'the stag can smell with more than its nostrils.'

As the stoppage took place directly in the bed of a brawling burn where they all lay on their stomachs, Holcroft not unnaturally asked, with no small irritation, what he meant; and the wiry young Highlander, who was whiskered and moustached to such an extent that, with his shaggy eyebrows, he somewhat resembled a Skye terrier in visage, explained his theory—no uncommon one, though, of course, not admitted by naturalists—that the red deer can both smell and breathe through the curious aperture beneath each eye, even if their heads are immersed in water when in the act of drinking.

'Dioul!' muttered Angus, as they crept forward again, but on dry heather this time; 'we can't be too cautious, whateffer! A deer's eye is as keen as an eagle's, and his nose acute as that of a founmart.'

'The first shot shall be yours, Holcroft,' said Cameron. 'I shall reserve my fire. He seems a powerful animal, and, if you only wound him, we may have the devil to pay!'

'Thanks—but how?' whispered Holcroft.

'If the dogs bring him to bay, he may turn upon us ere another cartridge can be dropped in the barrel, and gore deep with his horns.'

English sportsmen generally prefer having the deer driven to

stalking them, for the bodily exertion requisite in the latter case tries so severely every muscle and sinew; but, to the true Highland hunter, one deer shot after a long and adventurous stalk is worth a hundred knocked over after a successful drive by gillies, when the herd is urged in wild confusion through some narrow pass well garrisoned by breech-loaders in secure ambush.

While Holcroft and Cameron crept softly forward nearer the browsing deer, the young keeper threw his plaid over the eyes of the staghound Shiuloch, and held it in by main strength, though his wrist was nearly dislocated by the strain of the leash, and the ill-suppressed whimpers of the animal were lost amid its muffling.

‘Now,’ whispered Angus hoarsely, full of excitement—‘now is your time, sir!’

Holcroft took a long aim; in his intense anxiety, and perhaps inspired by vanity, he overdid his aim; he fired at the precise moment Allan’s shot was heard in the distant corrie, but only wounded the stag in the shoulder, and, just as he let fly the contents of the other barrel (and missed), it fled away with the speed of the wind, followed by the swift and powerful hound, which, quick as thought, Angus let slip, and both vanished down a deep glen, overhung by silver birches, close by.

‘*Ohone a Dhia!* but he has missed it, after all—it is no use guiding a Sassenach whateffer!’ muttered Angus, under his thick, ruddy moustache; yet, as Cameron could read by the expression that twinkled in his hazel eyes, secretly not ill pleased at the result, however.

‘I almost did it—hit him, at all events!’ said Holcroft, with intense mortification, as he was too much of an Englishman not to wish to excel in everything that appertained to sport.

‘Almost!’ repeated Angus, who added to Cameron, in a low voice, ‘*Cha d’rinse theob riomh sealg!*’ (i.e., Almost, never killed the game).

‘Better luck next time,’ said the young Laird of Stratherroch consolingly. ‘Allan has knocked over his deer, I see.’

‘Attempt and Did-not were the two worst hounds of Fingal,’ muttered Angus, in his Perthshire Gaelic, with a furtive glance, full of meaning, at Stratherroch.

‘To the genuine Highlander,’ says a recent English writer, ‘it is a fixed article of belief that there never yet was a Sassenach who knew more about the wind and weather, or about the innumerable other mysteries which furnish the stalker with the tact and skill required to perfect him in his difficult craft, than a cow understands of conic sections. With true Celtic caution and prudence, the gillies tolerate the opulent tenant from the south out of respect for his cheque-book and his frequent drafts upon it; but in their hearts they look upon him as an *intruder*, and are not sorry when they contemplate his receding form, as he turns his face homewards, and leaves moor, loch, and mountain, glen and forest to their natural denizens.’

And in this spirit Angus was secretly regarding the unconscious Mr. Holcroft, who had the genuine Southern idea that no man or woman born could undervalue him.

So the little shooting-party united now, and, not unwillingly, all sat down to have luncheon, as they were sharply appetised by long exercise in the keen mountain air, and on no other tablecloth than the purple heather; the ample contents of a hamper—game pies, cold beef, bread, champagne (cooled in an adjacent runnel), whisky, and so forth—were laid out by the active hands of the gillies, expectant of their own repast when the time came.

They lunched near the mossy ruins of a clachan—some of those melancholy ruins so common over all the Highlands, the traces of a departed people who have passed away to other lands, evicted by grasping selfishness to make way for grouse and deer.

There, the low, shattered gables, an old well, some goose-

berry bushes that marked 'where a garden had been,' were all that remained of a once-populous village, whose men had often gone forth to fight for Scotland in the wars of old, and whose descendants in latter years had manned more than one company of the Black Watch in Egypt and the Peninsula.

On the sunny hill-slope close by, a ruined wall, low and circular—above which appeared the grey arms of a solitary Celtic cross, an aged yew-tree, and where long grass waved in the wind—marked where lay the last of the clan, whom no human power could evict or send towards the setting sun; and these imparted a melancholy to the solemn scenery, for solemn it was with all its beauty.

It was of that kind peculiar to some parts of Perthshire, where the subordinate hills, rising a thousand feet and more above the valley, are entirely covered with dusky pines, taking away all that appearance of blackness and desolation presented by naked mountain masses, and adding softness and beauty to the landscape, which would otherwise be stern and grim. Nor were the glassy loch and the murmuring torrent wanting there, nor those passes where the mountains approach each other, and make them, like that of Killiecrankie, excel even the famous Vale of Tempe.

Though not very impressionable by nature, Holcroft, influenced by the good things he was imbibing, said something about the beauty of the scenery, to which Lord Aberfeldie responded, adding, with a laugh:

'I do enjoy life in a shooting-box, and of all the entrancing sports to me there is none like stalking the deer.'

With his sodden knickerbocker suit drying slowly upon him in the mountain wind, Holcroft could only assent to this faintly, and wished perhaps that, like Stratherroch, he wore a kilt, and could wring the water out of the plaits thereof.

'Of old in Scotland,' resumed Lord Aberfeldie, as he lit his briar-root pipe, 'no man was deemed perfect in the craft of

hunting till he had landed a salmon from the pool, shot an eagle on the wing, and killed a stag. But, when here in a shooting-box, I always thank heaven that I am at least fifteen miles from a telegraph wire, that letters can only come once a day, and just before dinner, and bills and lawyers' letters seldom or never at all. Have a glass of something before you lunch, Dugald,' he said, addressing his venerable keeper; 'I know you will prefer Glenlivet to all the Clicquot and Mœt in the world.'

'A cless, thank you kindly, my lord,' replied Dugald, touching his bonnet, 'though my mouth can hold more of whateffer it be.'

And, bowing to the company, Dugald drained it in quick time.

'I dare say, Holcroft,' said Allan, 'you would prefer the deer driven to being stalked?'

'Infinitely!' replied the other, as he quaffed a bumper of sparkling Moselle.

'Well, I for one do not,' said the Master emphatically.

'The Highlander of old would follow a stag for days, or even for weeks, if necessary,' observed Lord Aberfeldie, with kindling eyes; 'sleeping in his plaid among the heather, he would lie where night found him. With his long gaff he would catch a salmon between the water and the sky; but when stalking he had no conception of the brutal German battues now so common in the Highlands, and so degrading to sport,' he added; in his energy, forgetting that there was something of rebuke in his remarks, which certainly made Holcroft's cheek redden with annoyance, and his rather shifty eyes to lower.

The Master, aware that this subject was rather a hobby with his father, hastened to change the conversation by observing:

'How strange it seems, Stratherroch, that you and I should be so suddenly here after all these past years with the regiment—here among the purple heather and green bracken again.'

'And a few weeks hence will see us with it again, and back to the old pipe-clay routine,' said Cameron.

'Regiments are now no longer what they were in *my* time,' said Lord Aberfeldie, a little irrelevantly, perhaps, but pursuing his own ideas. 'Examinations, cramming and useless pedantry, promotion by selection and compulsory retirement for the officers, with short service among the men, render corps no longer what they were in the old days—each a happy, movable home. The time when a young officer often said, with just pride and noble ambition, "My father and my grandfather have both commanded *this* regiment, and, please God, I hope at some period to do the same," can never come again! And what Highland officer now, in the Black Watch or any other of our national regiments, is followed to the colours by a band of his own name and kindred, or can speak of his comrades as "my father's people," or "the men from our glen"? and yet such was the case when yonder ruined clachan was instinct with village life, and the voices of children were heard around its humble hearths.'

'The hero of Ghuznee had a theory that no Scotsman was fitted to command a regiment,' said Stratherroch, laughing.

'I know that he detested Scotsmen, and brought six officers, all Scotsmen, to a court-martial; and it was then he is said to have made the statement which cost him so dear in India.'

'How?' asked Holcroft.

'Because, within an hour after, old Colonel Wemyss, of the 52nd, paraded him in rear of the cantonment, and planted a bullet in his body by way of curing him of prejudice for the future. Rather a convincing argument, old Wemyss thought it,' added Aberfeldie, laughing, as he knocked the ashes from his cherished briar-root, put it in its case, and dropped it into his silver-mounted sporran.

'Talking of regiments, I saw yours at Portsmouth, Graham,' said Holcroft; 'and I thought the men looked graceful indeed,

with their kilts over their left shoulders and their black sporrans waving above their bronzed faces.'

Whether this was meant as a joke or a sneer, it is impossible to say; but his hearers took it as the former, and laughed accordingly, on which Holcroft added:

'I mean their plaid-shawls over their shoulders. I remember that Miss Raymond laughed heartily when I made the same remark.'

'I don't wonder at that,' said Lord Aberfeldie. 'Olive is a girl who laughs on very slight occasions.'

'You have not seen her since your return?' said Holcroft to Allan Graham.

'No; but I shall very soon now.'

'She is a very handsome girl; what the deuce have the men been about to leave her all this time Miss Raymond?'

'All this time! Why, she has not yet seen her twentieth year,' exclaimed Allan, with some annoyance, as he thought of the photo.

'Her costumes are *chic*,' continued Holcroft, '*chic* to a degree! How I admired her portrait in the Grosvenor Gallery; and wise was the artist to label it "Fair to See."'

Allan glanced at his father, and his face clouded to hear all this—praise though it was—in the mouth of Hawke Holcroft.

'You have an appreciation of beauty, apparently,' said young Cameron.

'Who has not? Thus, as Disraeli says, "the action of lovely woman on our destiny is increasing," and, as Miss Raymond——'

'I am Miss Raymond's uncle and guardian,' said Lord Aberfeldie rather stiffly, and to Mr. Holcroft, it seemed, a little irrelevantly, though cutting short whatever he meant to say; for the peer winced at the way in which his guest referred to his niece in the hearing of gillies and gamekeepers, and, more than all, in the presence of Allan, whose dark eyes wore rather a lowering expression; but, as all had hearty appetites

after their recent exercise and long exposure in the keen, bracing mountain air of an autumn day, they were inclined to use their knives and forks rather than their tongues, and the subject, however pleasing to Mr. Holcroft, was dropped.

The latter was not a pleasing type of Englishman, though his air and bearing were thoroughly those of a gentleman. He had a good square figure, but his legs were somewhat of the spindle order, as his knickerbocker suit revealed. He was flaxen-haired, fair-skinned, and somewhat freckled, with a tawny moustache and pale grey eyes ; and strange it was that these, though weak-looking, cunning, and shifty, would assume at times, but covertly, a defiant, even ferocious expression, if evil passions excited him.

He was almost destitute of eyebrows, but had a massive chin ; and as Allan Graham regarded him, as he lay stretched upon the grass leisurely smoking, he by no means showed his father's sentiment of friendship for this son of an old friend ; and there grew in his breast a mysterious instinct—almost a presentiment—that Holcroft would in some way or other bring trouble upon them conjunctly or severally.

After the keepers and gillies had their repast, the luncheon apparatus was packed up, and, shouldering their rifles, the party set out for the shooting-box, which was situated in a pretty glen a few miles distant.

Angus, who was—as his father boasted—strong as Cuchullin, again lifted the deer to the pony's back, and preceded by the family piper, Ronald Gair, with his pipes in full blast to the air of 'The Birks of Aberfeldie,' they departed down the winding path towards the dark blue loch that lay at the foot of the solemn, pine-clad hills.

Like the gillies and keepers, Ronald was never seen without a sprig of the *Buaidh craob na Laibhreis* (the laurel-tree of victory), the badge of the Grahams, in his bonnet.

Ronald Gair's locks were silver now, but they had been dark

enough when he played the Black Watch up the green slopes of the Alma, through all Central India, to the gates of Lucknow, and in later times to the corpse-encumbered swamps of Coomassie.

Holcroft winced at what he deemed the dissonance of the pipes, and cursed their sound in his heart ; but he was too well-bred or too prudent to say anything on the subject as he strode by Cameron's side down the strath, with a huge regalia between his teeth. Indeed, he might have been pretty well used to their sound by this time, as Ronald Gair roused the household with them in the morning, preceded many a meal—dinner always—and seemed to spend most of his time in incessant ' tuning up ' between.

' I have a suspicion that he is bad form—this Holcroft,' said Allan to his father, as they could converse, unheard by the other two, amid the din of the pipes, which Ronald blew as if to awake the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, or Holgar Danske in his cavern at Elsinore. ' I have heard that he half lives on play and his betting-book, and that his little place in Essex, or rather what remains of it, is dipped over head and ears. Indeed, he admitted jocularly to Cameron that it was mortgaged for thrice its value, three times over, a fact which would teach the holders prudence for the future. Why did you have him here or at Dundargue ?'

' Well—his father and I were old friends, as you know ; his father, in fact, by an act of great bravery, saved my life at the Alma, when three Russians were at the point of bayoneting me, as I lay helpless on the field ; so you see, Allan, I cannot help being at least hospitable to the poor fellow, and certainly his friend.'

Indeed, Lord Aberfeldie had always been the latter to Holcroft, and not seldom his ' banker ' ; but of this Allan knew nothing, nor was ever likely to know, so far as his father was concerned.

‘He seems to consider Olive an heiress,’ said Allan, after a pause.

‘As—of course—she is.’

‘And he dared to speak of her under the slangy name of “cash” to Stratherroch, as I, by chance, overheard.’

Lord Aberfeldie knitted his dark brows, and said :

‘I detest slang—it is deuced bad form ; but Holcroft belongs, I know, to a horsey set.’

The sun was setting now, and gradually his crimson glory was paling in fire on the hill-tops, till it faded out and died away, and the shadows of the September night crept upward step by step from the deep glens below, and one by one the stars came out above the trees—a sea of dark and solemn pines that covered all the mountain slopes—and ere long the red lights from the curtained windows of the luxurious shooting-lodge were seen to cast long lines of wavering radiance across the bosom of the loch, by the margin of which it stood.

Ere this, the greyhound Shiuloch (whose name means *speed*) had returned, drenched with water (showing that he had pursued the stag into some distant loch) and bloody with more than one wound inflicted by antlers.

The sharp-set hunters had dined luxuriously, and cigars with brandy and soda had become the order of the night, when the Master said to his father : ‘I think I have had enough of deer-stalking—three weeks nearly—and to-morrow I shall start for Dundargue.’

‘I think you are wise to do so,’ replied Lord Aberfeldie, with a pointed glance.

‘Sorry to lose you, Graham,’ said Holcroft, concealing under a bright smile his secret annoyance, envy, and alarm, of all which more anon.

In this sudden resolution Allan Graham was influenced, perhaps, by some remarks of his father, the viscount, and pique at those of Hawke Holcroft, together with a natural longing to

see his mother and sister, and a growing consciousness that he had been somewhat remiss and, to say the least of it, ungallant to his cousin. Thus, next day, he took his departure for Dundargue; but he could little foresee all the bitter complications that were to arise, and to culminate in the future, through his merely lingering to stalk deer in his father's forest.

When he went off, none shook his hand more warmly than Hawke Holcroft, though the latter muttered under his breath:

'Fool that I was, not to make my innings before this fellow came; but if some people could be put out of the way, that others might take their place, how much pleasanter this world would be—to other people, at least.'

Little did the family of Aberfeldie know that in Hawke Holcroft they had among them an unscrupulous adventurer and most dangerous guest!

CHAPTER III.—UNCLE RAYMOND'S WILL.

'MARRIAGE, indeed!' exclaimed Olive Raymond, 'it will be time enough to speak of that when this "laggard in love," your brother, turns up here at Dundargue. Besides, all women don't marry, so why should I?'

'Most pretty ones do, and marry you must!' replied, with a merry little laugh, Eveline Graham, the sole daughter of the house of Aberfeldie, to her English cousin, as she usually called her.

'Such stuff all this is! Does not the author of "The Red Rag" say that "if there *is* a circumstance calculated to breed mutual detestation in the minds of two young people, it is the knowledge that their respective parents have destined them for each other"?''

'How readily you quote,' said Eveline.

'Because I have the subject at heart.'

They were posed like a couple of Du Maurier's fashionable girls, and were leisurely sipping afternoon tea at a pretty Chippendale table from an exquisite Wedgwood service, and, for freedom to gossip, had dispensed with all attendance.

Both the cousins were handsome girls, whose bearded, belted, and corsletted ancestors—portraits of whom hung on the walls, and who had often

‘Carved at the meal with gloves of steel,’

in that same Castle of Dundargue—would have regarded such a repast and such a beverage as ‘afternoon tea’ with no small wonder, and, perhaps, disgust.

Eveline Graham was very softly featured and slender in figure; but Olive Raymond, who was the taller of the two, was more fully developed, yet looked slim as a Greek goddess in a dress of deep blue that became her pure complexion and rich brown hair, with only a tiny bouquet of white flowers in the brooch at her bosom, and a multitude of silver bangles—emblems of conquest, perhaps—like silver fetters, on her slender and snowy wrists. She was fair and colourless, with dark grey violet eyes that looked black under their jetty fringes at night.

Eveline was more dazzling fair, but more *petite*, with soft, hazel eyes, and bright, brown hair that was shot with gold. She had exquisite hands and feet, and though *petite*, as we say, and slender, she had a peculiar grace and dignity of manner that only required a brocade dress, ruff, and long stomacher to make her like one of her stately ‘forbears’ whose portraits by Jameson were in the room in which she sat—a modern portion of the grim old Castle of Dundargue, the aspect and construction of which edifice were very different from those of the additions that had been made to it in later times.

And as the girls sit there, in the tempered light of the afternoon sun streaming through the French windows that open to

a stately balustrated terrace, and sip their tea leisurely, their conversation will throw some light upon the past, and perhaps the future, of certain of our *dramatis personæ*.

‘When Allan returns——’ began Eveline.

‘Oh, don’t talk to me again of Allan!’ interrupted Olive Raymond, with a petulant toss of her pretty head, ‘or I will begin to tease you about Stratherroch.’

‘How?’ asked Eveline, colouring perceptibly.

‘He loves you—and you know he does.’

‘Yes,’ said Eveline, as a soft smile stole over her mignonne face; ‘I cannot doubt it, though no word from which I could infer it has ever escaped his lips; but poor Cameron has little more than his pay. His paternal acres are mortgaged to the full—even the shootings and fishings, I believe, don’t come to him. I heard papa express to mamma his surprise that Cameron could ‘pull through,’ as he phrased it; that he would have no ineligibles, in future, dangling about me, and that—as I have nothing—I must marry *money*! That was the word—oh, how selfish it sounds, and how hateful!’ added the girl, while her rosy little nether lip quivered. ‘Poor Evan!’ she murmured, dreamily; and as she uttered his name her voice, which was soft even as Cordelia’s, became, like that of Annie Laurie, ‘low and sweet.’

‘Ineligibles!’ said her cousin; ‘and yet he invited here Mr. Holcroft, who is well-nigh penniless, and against whose attentions Aunt Aberfeldie specially warned me.’

‘In the interests of Allan, of course.’

‘Allan—absurd!’ exclaimed Olive, shrugging her handsome shoulders. ‘You all seem to forget that he can only remember me as a little girl.’

‘Still you are his *fiancée*.’

‘In a manner of way.’

‘Distinctly so, if the tenor of your papa’s will is to be observed.’

‘Then I think he might have had some curiosity about me,

instead of spending days at that stupid deer-forest. For all he knows, I might have been a veritable fright !' added Olive, with growing pique, as she glanced at the reflection of her own beautiful self in an adjacent console-mirror. 'If he thinks that, as Master of Aberfeldie, he has only to come and see and conquer, I shall teach him that he is very much mistaken.'

'Olive—how can you talk thus?' expostulated soft little Eveline ; 'his delay is probably all papa's fault.'

'I am sure that I shall hate him then !'

'Query?' said Eveline, with a saucy smile on her lovely lips.

'There is no query in this case,' persisted Olive, as she set down her cup with a jerk ; for in her spirit of freedom there was at times a curious but unexpressed antagonism in her heart to the family of Aberfeldie, as if she felt herself somewhat in their power, and even to her own disadvantage ; and this spirit, which Holcroft was not slow to discover, had rather encouraged his hopes.

'He will be sure to love you, at all events, Olive dear, if he has any sense or power of observation at all—you are so pretty—nay, so charming.'

'Any fool may love a pretty face, and generally does so.'

'But you possess much more than a pretty face, Olive.'

'Yes—the fortune which I am to share with him ere my twenty-fifth year.'

'Or, if you refuse——'

'One half of it goes to him, and the other, or nearly so, to charitable institutions,' exclaimed Olive, her sweet face paling with absolute anger.

'He will love you for yourself alone, I am assured,' persisted Eveline, in defence of her brother. 'You are beautiful, Cousin Olive ; you ride, row, dance, play lawn-tennis, and flirt to perfection. Are not all these qualities calculated to excite admiration in a young officer? and then, more than all, you have such dear, funny ways with you.' And the warm-hearted

girl concluded by laughing and kissing her cousin on both cheeks effusively.

The tenor of this remarkable will, which has been referred to more than once, was, to say the least of it, peculiar.

Some years before this period, Olive Raymond arrived at Dundargue an orphan, left in charge of Lord Aberfeldie—the child of his only sister, Muriel Graham, who had married a Mr. Raymond, a poor man, whom means furnished by the Aberfeldie family enabled to become one of the wealthiest planters in Jamaica. Both her parents had died early, and after her location at Dundargue she became a species of sister to Eveline and Allan Graham.

Happy, indeed, was Olive alike in her Scottish home in the lovely Carse of Gowrie, and when the family took up their abode, according to the season or the sitting of Parliament, at their West-end residence in London.

By will, Mr. Oliver Raymond left his entire fortune, which was very considerable, to his daughter; but, in gratitude to the family of his wife, on the strange condition that she was to marry his nephew, Allan Graham, whose death alone was to free her from that contingency. If she unreasonably refused, then, in that case, after her twenty-fifth year, she was to forfeit all that would accrue to her, save a very slender allowance—the share so forfeited to become the inheritance of her cousin Allan; and if *he* declined to wed his cousin Olive, then, in *that* case, the money so forfeited was to go to such Scottish charitable institutions as Lord Aberfeldie and the other trustees might select.

This will was, undoubtedly, a strange one; but then Mr. Raymond had been a strange and eccentric man, animated by an intense regard and esteem for the family of his deceased wife, the Grahams of Aberfeldie, to whom he felt all his good fortune had been due.

As children, the tenor of this tyrannical will in no way

affected the relations of Olive and Allan with each other ; and the latter—a manly and sturdy lad, when at home from the College of Glenalmond, where he pursued his studies and cultivated cricket, boxing, and football—petted and made much of the violet-eyed and brown-haired little cousin, who had dropped among them as if from the clouds ; but after he had joined the Black Watch as a subaltern, and years passed on, and they began to be talked of and deemed in the family circle as an engaged couple, betrothed, affianced, and all the rest of it, the young beauty and heiress began to resent the terms of the will bitterly, perhaps not unreasonably ; she became, as we have said, antagonistic, and was perplexed to think that her father could not have foreseen some difficulties on the part of his two legatees.

Thus, as they both grew older, she seldom replied to the letters which Allan wrote to her, by his parent's desire, perhaps, rather than his own, till he ceased to write to her at all, on which she became severely piqued ; and once when she was a little way on in her 'teens,' and when Allan was at home for a very brief period before departing to India, she treated him with an indifference—almost animosity—that made him deem the girl wayward, cold-hearted, even purse-proud, and everything unpleasant ; and with this fatal impression he rejoined the Black Watch, and amid many a flirtation might soon have forgotten the heiress that was growing up for him at Dundargue, but for the letters he received from thence, and in which ample references to her and her beauty and accomplishments were never omitted ; while she, on the other hand, when she became of a marriageable age, seldom ceased to stigmatise the will as outrageous, indelicate, grotesque, and unjust. And now that her cousin Allan was coming home—nay, *had* come home—for a protracted period on leave of absence, she felt that a crisis was at hand in her fate—a crisis in which she, like a hunted creature, knew not how to escape.

‘Yes, Allan will soon learn to love you for your own sake,’ returned the gentle Eveline, after a pause.

‘How can I ever be certain of that? Oh, I owe little indeed to papa, who by such a will as his seeks to degrade both your brother and myself,’ replied Olive.

‘Degrade!’ exclaimed Eveline, her hazel eyes distending.

‘Yes—by forcing us into a marriage on one hand, or to accepting starvation on the other.’

‘Starvation!—such strong language, Olive,’ said Eveline, in a tone of rebuke.

Of the alleged tie that bound her to Allan Graham, and of the latter himself, personally, she had never thought so seriously as she had done of *late*; and, truth to tell, in the opportunities afforded by mutual residence in a country house—that great rambling castle especially—Mr. Hawke Holcroft, by his subtle attentions when no one else was near, had begun to interest her more than Lord or Lady Aberfeldie could have relished or conceived; and to her it seemed that for some time back at Dundargue (continuing a sentiment he had striven to rouse during a past season in London) his eyes had been telling in imploring and passionate glances what his lips had not yet the audacity to utter; but then the girl was young, enthusiastic, impressionable, and far from insensible to admiration and flattery.

Though she did not and could not regard Allan Graham as a lover, and disliked thus to view him in the light of her intended husband, circumstances now compelled her to *think* of him; and though she remembered him chiefly as the playmate of her childhood, she was piqued that he seemed in no haste to meet and see her, but instead had openly manifested, as she thought, indifference and lack of interest or curiosity, by shooting at Aberfeldie Lodge for days.

Thus pique made her not indisposed to encourage the attention of others, especially of Hawke Holcroft, as we shall

show when he returned to Dundargue before his departure for London.

Olive Raymond in her pride of heart bitterly resented the tenor of her father's will. She knew that, by the chances of war, climate, and foreign service generally, she might never have seen her cousin again ; but now the inevitable seemed at hand, and she felt herself in a measure set apart for him as fairly as if she had personally betrothed herself. But was she to be bound, while he was absolutely free? And stories she had heard—some of them artfully and casually dropped by Holcroft—of more than one flirtation at Chatham and elsewhere added to the pique in which she was indulging.

Lady Aberfeldie now came in through one of the open French windows for her cup of afternoon tea, with a bright scarlet shawl loosely floating over her handsome head and shapely shoulders, quitting the terrace, where she had been amusing herself by feeding the peacocks.

She was looking unusually radiant as she announced that Angus, the young keeper, had just come from the shooting lodge to inform her that the Master would be home that afternoon, and that his rooms must be put in order for him without delay.

So, on hearing this, the wilful Olive resolved to pay a protracted visit elsewhere, and to be absent when he did arrive.

No woman understood the art of dressing better than Lady Aberfeldie, and well was she aware how truly a dainty maize, or a coral colour with rich black lace trimmings, became her brunette tints, her dark hair and eyes, her pure yet slightly olive complexion. Her whole air was graceful and queenly, as befitted one who was always to 'walk in silk attire.'

Lady Aberfeldie never forgot that she had been the belle of three seasons in Belgravia, and an heiress to boot, though the memories of others might be less retentive ; and now, in her fortieth year, she was a very handsome, blooming woman still.

'We must have some dinners and no end of dances and

lawn-tennis parties, mamma, in honour of Allan's return,' said Eveline, as she assisted her mother to tea.

'Thank God, my dear boy is home—home again—and safe at last—after all he has faced and undergone,' said Lady Aberfeldie, with a bright and fond expression in her fine face. 'Why it seems but yesterday, Olive, that you and he were little chits playing together on the lawn or at Nannie's knee—when you had rag dolls, and used to sing together of the old woman that lived in a shoe, or "High upon Highlands and low upon Tay," or of

"Alexander, King of Macedon,
Who conquered the world but Scotland alone;
When he came to Scotland his courage grew cold,
To find a little nation courageous and bold,
So stout and so bold——"

You remember the nursery song, Olive?

'I have forgotten it, aunt.'

'Then I hope you will remember in its place the adage——'

'What adage?' interrupted Olive sharply.

'That a good son makes a good husband,' said Lady Aberfeldie archly, and laughing as she tapped her niece's soft cheek with her teaspoon.

'Adages are not to my taste, aunt.'

'Child, what makes you seem so cross to-day?'

'The weather, perhaps,' suggested Eveline.

But Olive, who had rather a mutinous expression in her soft face, remained silent.

'This is bad form in our day of joy,' said Lady Aberfeldie, who had been eyeing her closely. 'In society well-bred people always control their emotions—their feelings.'

'Easy enough for them, aunt.'

'How?'

'Because they have seldom any feelings to control.'

And to prevent more being said with reference to Allan—a subject she dreaded—Olive Raymond withdrew,

CHAPTER IV.—THE GRAHAMS OF DUNDARGUE.

Who would have imagined that within a few yards of the elegant and stately modern drawing-room in which these three handsome women of the best style were chatting and sipping their tea, there still existed within the old walls of Dundargue a hideous *oubliette* or bottle-dungeon, like those that were in the Castle of St. Andrews and ancient peel of Linlithgow—so named from the French word to ‘forget.’

Shaped like a bottle, it was—and is—totally dark and of great depth, with no outlet but its narrow mouth, through which prisoners were precipitated and left to die. ‘Dante,’ says Victor Hugo, when describing that in the Bastille, ‘could find nothing better for the construction of his hell. These dungeon-funnels usually terminated in a deep hole like a tub, in which Dante has placed his Satan, and in which society placed the criminal condemned to death. When once a miserable human being was interred there—farewell light, air, life, and hope! It never went out but to the gibbet or the stake. Sometimes it was left to rot there, and human justice called that forgetting. Between mankind and himself the condemned felt an accumulation of stones and jailers, and the whole prison was but one enormous and complicated lock that barred him out of the living world.’

From such places the shrieks and wails of despair and death—death from thirst and hunger—never reached the upper air.

When the *oubliette* of Dundargue was examined a few years ago there was found in it a mass of unctuous-looking mould, that made those shudder who looked upon it. It was full of skulls and human bones. Of whom those beings had been even tradition was silent; but, as some coins of Edward I. of England were found among the ghastly remains, they were supposed to have been certain English prisoners or fugitives, who,

when flying from the siege of Perth, had fallen into the hands of Sir Malise Graham of Dundargue, in the Carse of Gowrie, a relentless enemy of the invaders of his country, who said, grimly, 'A few Englishmen less in the world would make the world all the better,' and, dropping them successively into the oubliette, placed a huge stone over the mouth of it, and 'forgot' all about them.

From a short distance beyond Dundee, called 'The Beautiful' in the days of old, the lovely and fertile Carse of Gowrie, so famed in Scottish song, stretches far westward, bounded by the Firth of Tay on the south and a line of undulating hills on the north, till it narrows to a vale among the rocky eminences that overlook the fair city of Perth.

The Carse is not quite a dead level, for here and there slope up wooded or cultivated elevations, named Inches, serving to show that in the ages they won their name the Carse had been a wide, open lake; but above one of these Inches towers the abrupt, though not very lofty, rock crowned by the Castle of Dundargue, an edifice on which the surrounding hills have looked down for centuries.

Bronze or iron rings, to which the Romans are said to have moored their galleys, were lately to be seen in the rock of Dundargue, and cables have been found at the foot of the Sidlaw Hills, relics of the time when an inland sea rolled its waves against their now grassy slopes.

The original castle, or strong square tower, starts flush from the edge of the rock, out of which its oubliette and lower vaults are hollowed, standing clear and minute against the sky, and its machicolated battlements rise high above the more florid modern additions of the days of James VI. and Queen Anne.

From its stone bartizan can be seen the sweep of the broad, blue Firth of Tay, with its vessels, the varied surface of the beautiful Carse of Gowrie, clothed with leafy timber, narrow

stripes of sand-edged land, and long stretches of cultivated ground, studded with curious old orchards and ancient and hoary forests of dwarf oak ; and on the north and west the glorious blue mountains, piled over each other in ranges, and capped, afar off, by the historic Grampians.

The earliest portion of the edifice is said to have been built by Sir Malise Graham, and possesses the battlemented bartizan, which was a decided feature in the architecture of Scotland long before her intimate connection with the Continent ; and the tenures of many houses in the vicinity are still held by owners who, if they had to fulfil the original obligations, would be compelled to bring to the castle coals for its fires, beer and beef for its tables, and oats for the chargers of the men-at-arms, with cords to bind and hang prisoners condemned to the dule-tree.

The Grahams, Viscounts of Aberfeldie and Barons of Dundargue, in the peerage of Scotland, had the barony bestowed on them in 1600, in consequence of the bravery of the then laird at the battle of Benrinnes, six years before, and the viscounty in 1648, for doughty deeds done in the wars of the Covenant ; but they had been lairds of Dundargue in days that were remote indeed—the days of that Graham who, when expiring of a mortal wound on the field of Dunbar, gave his sword—the same weapon now preserved in the house of Montrose—to his son, ‘the Graham’ of future battles, ‘the Richt Hand of Wallace,’ in whose arms he expired of a wound, after the battle of Falkirk, leaving the patronymic of ‘gallant,’ to all his descendants.

In one apartment hung with Gobelin tapestry stood a bed wherein Charles II. had reposed before his coronation at Scone ; and another had been occupied by his nephew, James VIII., of the Scottish Jacobites, before he went to visit Castle Lyon, the guest of John, Lord Aberfeldie, who declined to sit in the Union Parliament, and who, to the end of his days, even

when George III. was king, was wont to assert 'that green peas and other edibles were always a month later, after that vile and degrading incorporation,' and that many a sweet flower never blossomed again after the White Rose was destroyed at Cul-loden.

In right of gift to an ancestor, the present peer was Hereditary Keeper of the Royal Palace of Falkland, and as such wore a key and chain of silver at his neck on collar days at Windsor and elsewhere.

It was a September afternoon—almost evening—when the pastures had become parched, the foliage shrivelled and of various tints, and high-piled wains came rocking over the furrowed fields and through green lanes, as the harvest was led home, that a horseman 'might have been seen' (to use the phraseology of Mr. G. P. R. James)—nay, was seen—to ride leisurely down the Carse, and take a flying leap over a hedge into the great lawn of Dundargue, and then, after trotting his horse between belts of trees, he drew his bridle for a few minutes, while he lingered and regarded fondly and admiringly the old structure, which he had not seen for well-nigh seven years; and Allan, the Master of Aberfeldie—for he the rider was—thought there was not in all the Carse of Gowrie another residence to compare with Dundargue for the many stories and characteristics that circle about a house which has been for ages the home of one family, with all its historic memories, its traditions and patriotism.

The shadows of the great old trees under which more than one Scottish king had blown his hunting-horn fell far along the turf, that was green as an emerald and soft as velvet. A semi-transparent haze, mingling with the sunshine, pervaded the Carse land; the smoke of an adjacent village ascended from the hoary orchards around it, and far eastward fell the shadow of the tall and weather-worn keep of Dundargue, with all its tourelles, or Scottish turrets, tinted redly by the rays of the

setting sun ; and Allan's heart swelled as he looked around, for the love of his native land was strong within him, and he recalled the words of an English writer, who describes it as the place chosen by Nature as the mirror of her beauty :

‘ She has planted it in the northern seas, with its mountains fronting the western sun, and watered its plains and valleys with a thousand streams, over which the lights of heaven are poured with an illumination and a glory, with an entanglement and a mingling of all the colours that can make earth beautiful. There is no land in all the world which, for the softer splendours of mountain and fell, wood and stream, surpasses Scotland !’

And Allan now remembered that the green ridge on which he had reined up his horse for a moment or two had been to him a place of fear, when a child, as the abode of the *Daoine Shi*—the goblins or fairies—who could be heard at work in the heart of the knoll, busily opening and shutting great chests, the contents of which were alleged to be the pillage of pantries, larders, and meal-girnels ; and once an old housekeeper at Dundargue, who contrived to circumvent them by securing the door of her premises, was struck with blindness, from which she did not recover till the barrier was removed.

Allan saw a lady suddenly appear upon a path close by that which led to the avenue ; and she proved to be no other than Olive Raymond, who, intent on being absent when he arrived, came thus upon him face to face, yet neither knew the other.

On her arm she bore a little basket, with some presents for her poor pensioners. The cordiality and kindness of Olive to the poor and labouring people made the periodical return of the household from London and elsewhere more than a matter for local rejoicing. There were none about Dundargue but loved her, as they also did Eveline Graham, though the latter did less among them ; and the Scottish peasantry, it must be borne in mind, unlike others elsewhere, are usually too

self-reliant and full of proper pride to accept aid from Dorcas, blanket, food, or coal societies.

Well mounted, Allan had substituted a light-grey tweed suit, which well became his dark complexion, for his shooting-kilt and jacket, and as a sudden light or conviction came upon him, aided by a memory of the photo he had seen in Holcroft's possession, he sprang from his horse when the lady drew near.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, as he threw the bridle over his arm and lifted his hat; 'I cannot be mistaken, changed though you are—you are my cousin, Olive Raymond?'

She blushed deeply, and said,

'And you—are Allan Graham!'

'Yes, Olive. Oh! how good, how kind of you to come and meet me,' he replied, his heart beating lightly as he looked into her beautiful face and deftly possessed himself of her hands.

'Far from it,' she replied, seeking to release herself, and now growing pale with positive annoyance at his supposition. 'I have some duties to do at the village. I hope you enjoyed your shooting excursion?' she observed, after a pause.

'I did—and yet——'

'So much so, indeed, that you were in no haste to come home,' said she, laughing to conceal her secret vexation at the rencontre.

Allan found his intended wife all that he could have wished, and more than he could have imagined. The little girl he had left had now expanded into a tall, proud, and lovely one—lovelier than he had ever dreamed of her being; and under her pretty black velvet hat her grey-violet eyes regarded him with a curious mixture of shyness and confusion in their expression, and—though he did not then detect it—resentment.

When he had last seen his 'little wife,' as he was wont to call her *then*, she was a madcap girl, with all her golden hair flying far and wide from a pearly neck and brow, rippling and

unconfined. Now her braided hair was of the richest brown, and she was the belle of a London season, and he could not help acknowledging in his heart the many charms she possessed, and suddenly becoming very appreciative thereof.

‘I hope Mr. Holcroft is enjoying his sport among the hills?’ said she, after another pause.

‘Never mind Holcroft,’ replied Allan, a little piqued by her manner; ‘have you no welcome for me, Olive?’

‘Of course you are glad to be home again,’ said she evasively.

‘I have always loved dear old Dundargue, even when I came home as a boy from school, and now I shall love it more than ever.’

‘Why?’

‘Can you ask me—when you are its permanent inmate?’

‘I may not be so always,’ said she pointedly. ‘Nothing lasts for ever; but as we are cousins——’ she was about to add something, yet paused.

‘And *more* than mere cousins can ever be to each other. You might at least give me your hand, Olive,’ said he, drawing nearer to her as she looked up at him, earnestly, shyly, and then, he began to think, rather defiantly, with those wonderful violet-grey eyes of hers. She gave him her right hand, and, though cased in a tight glove, a soft and warm little hand it felt; but he drew her towards him, and, ere she could avert the act, was softly and swiftly kissed by him.

‘*Don’t*,’ she exclaimed, as she snatched her fingers from his clasp. ‘How dare you?’ she added, repelling him with both hands outspread, and a laughing indignation that was *not* all laughter; but he looked at the sweet red lips as though he longed to offend again.

‘Olive, how can you treat me thus, after all these years?’ he asked, with an emotion of annoyance. ‘Have you forgotten what jolly playmates we used to be; how we went nutting and

seeking birds' nest together, made rag dolls, and chorused "Alexander, King of Macedon," and so forth, with our old nurse, Nannie Mackinnon, the wife of Dugald Glas ?

'I have not forgotten; but I had thought, or hoped, that you had done so.'

'Why ?'

'I cannot say,' replied the wilful beauty, pouting and yet confessing in her secret heart how handsome he looked, and how winning he was in eye and manner.

'I remember, too,' said he laughingly, 'the scores of times we used to wander in the garden, or on the heather braes, seeking bees to *blob* and get the honey out of them; and when on May mornings you used to catch the snail by the horns, and toss it over your left shoulder as an omen of luck in marriage.'

'Allan, such odious and absurd things should be forgotten.'

'We were children, then; and what fun we had when fishing with tinnies in the burn for minnows and pow-wowits under the old brig-stone. Do you remember how I used to climb to get birds' nests for you, and how we wove fairy caps of rushes and bluebells in many a green howe of the Sidlaw Hills?'

'How can you treasure such childish memories, Allan?' she asked, but with momentary softness in her manner.

'Because such were very dear to me when far away in other lands and other scenes, when the Indian sky was like a sheet of heated iron overhead, and the breeze that came from the sandy desert was like the breath of the death-blast; when cattle perished by the empty tanks, the birds sat on the dusty trees with eyes closed and beaks agape, and when strong soldiers died on the line of march, stricken down by sun-stroke or sheer exhaustion.'

'Poor Allan !'

'And you are going to the village?' said he inquiringly, seeing that she manifested no desire to return with him,

'Yes,'

‘But won’t you accompany me home, now that I have returned?’

‘You must excuse me—I do so enjoy a walk in the evening before dinner.’

‘I have not seen my mother for seven years,’ he said reproachfully; yet, if you will permit me to accompany you to the village, I shall do so, and then escort you home.’

‘I cannot trespass on your time so much,’ she replied, with a slight *souçon* of sarcasm in her tone; ‘besides, what would Aunt Aberfeldie think of your being in no haste to see her, after lingering so long at the deer-forest?’

Allan thought rightly that he now detected the true source of her pique and peculiar greeting; but he knew nothing yet of her bitter opposition to the terms of her father’s will.

‘Aunt and Eveline are anxiously waiting you, so do not let me detain you longer. If an escort back is requisite, I shall doubtless find one with ease,’ and, nodding her head smilingly, she tripped down the tree-shaded avenue and left him; thus he had no choice, though looking after her with a sigh, but to remount and ride towards the house, or rather the castle, of Dundargue.

So—so she had so little interest in him, in his return and his society—that she would neither turn back with him nor permit him to escort her, but had left him to pay some trumpery visits which she could do at any other time, day, or hour.

‘How was this?’ he asked of himself. ‘Holcroft has certainly something to do with it. Why the deuce did my father bring the fellow here?’

Allan’s hitherto languid interest in her had become quickened by the sight of her undoubted beauty and grace, and he was, perhaps, a little unreasonably piqued by her open indifference as to his return from remote foreign service, and to his views and whole affairs. Thus the breach between these two—if such we may call it—seemed likely to widen.

In a few minutes more the affectionate effusiveness of the welcome home accorded him by his mother and his tender sister consoled him, but it contrasted in his mind powerfully and painfully with that of his cousin; yet he could scarcely expect that she would have flung her soft arms round his neck and kissed him again and again with hungry affection on both cheeks as they did.

‘The pater, dear old fellow, will be home in the course of a day or two,’ said he. ‘Mr. Holcroft is coming with him, and Stratherroch, of Ours, too,’ he added.

He noticed that Eveline’s pale cheek coloured for a moment at the name of the latter.

‘Ah, you know him, it seems?’ said he.

‘Yes, very well,’ replied Eveline frankly.

‘He has been at home with the *dépôt* lately. A right good sort is Evan Cameron, but desperately hard up, poor lad. I often think he will have to exchange for India, or something of that kind, though it would break his heart to leave the Black Watch.’

Eveline’s long lashes drooped as her brother said this, all unconscious that his casual remarks were secretly wounding her.

The expression he could plainly detect in the sweet and expressive face of his sister at the mention of Evan Cameron gave Allan some occasion for thought. He loved and esteemed his friend and brother-officer, but felt it would be a serious misfortune indeed if any affection took root between him and Eveline; for Evan was poor, as we have hinted, his estate valueless to him, and ‘at nurse’; and there was, moreover, a necessity for Eveline making a wealthy marriage—indeed, her father, Lord Aberfeldie, had already a suitor in view for her.

‘I am so sorry that our dear Olive is out,’ said Allan’s mother, breaking a little pause; ‘but we knew not at what hour to expect you.’

‘I met her in the avenue——’

‘And you knew each other—how strange!’ exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie, with a brightening face.

‘Yes, after a minute or two. She seems as charming a girl as one—to use a soldier’s phrase—might see in the longest day’s march.’

‘And such she is. She did not turn back with you?’

‘No, mother,’ he replied, with hesitation.

‘But she was, of course, glad to see you?’

‘I can’t say that she was particularly, mater dear; and she got into a regular pet because I dared to kiss her, even in a cousinly way.’

‘Dared, my darling boy!’ exclaimed his mother indignantly.

‘Fact, mater,’ said the Master, smiling and twirling up the ends of his long dark moustaches.

Lady Aberfeldie and her daughter exchanged a swift and mutual glance; but the latter knew more of the views of the young lady in question than the former did.

‘I am glad you are pleased with Olive,’ said she; ‘and when your acquaintance is fully resumed you will find the dear girl all you could wish.’

‘She has wonderful blue-grey eyes; they seem violet-blue when she smiles, and black when she is angry.’

‘Angry?’ said Lady Aberfeldie inquiringly.

‘Well, she rather looked so when I ventured to kiss her in the avenue,’ said Allan, laughing, and referring to a kiss that, though snatched, he was never to forget, perhaps, in the long years that were to come.

‘She has grown the very image of her mother, your poor Aunt Muriel, who was one of my bridesmaids.’

By visits to the minister’s manse and elsewhere Olive had wilfully and petulantly contrived to protract her absence from home to the last moment; the dressing-room bell had rung, and before dinner she was hastily given a few touches to her

costumes—not that she cared to attract her cousin (quite the reverse)—but she dismissed her foreign maid, Clairette Patchouli, on a sign that Eveline wished to talk with her alone.

‘Now, Olive,’ began the latter, ‘that you have seen Allan——’

‘I saw him years ago,’ interrupted Olive pettishly.

‘He was a boy then; but now that he is a man, and not the boy you remember, what do you think of him?’

Olive made no reply, but continued to slip her bangles on the whitest, roundest, and most taper pair of arms that ever bewildered the senses of man.

‘Isn’t he very handsome?’ persisted Eveline.

To partial eyes, perhaps, but there are plenty of men in the world quite as handsome—even more so, I doubt not. I like him already, but don’t let him think so; besides, I also like our English visitor, Mr. Holcroft.’

‘I do *not*!’ said Eveline decisively.

‘Why?’

‘He is horsey in bearing, and his face, though handsome, I grant you, often wears a sinister, sharp, and supercilious expression.’

‘How tanned Allan is by the Indian sun!’

‘I think his face and head both grand and handsome!’ exclaimed his sister, with affectionate enthusiasm; ‘he quite reminds me of the old Greeks.’

‘I was not aware you knew any of them,’ laughed Olive.

‘Their sculptures, I mean,’ replied Eveline, as they swept down the great staircase to the dining-room.

CHAPTER V.—OLIVE AND ALLAN

A FEW days had now passed since Allan Graham’s return to Dundargue, but he seemed—though greatly attracted by his cousin Olive, and in a manner compelled to think of her as something more than a mere cousin—to make no progress in

her favour at all. Sometimes he smoked beside her in utter silence, while she swung in a hammock between two trees on the lawn, deep—or affecting to be so—in the last three-volume novel that had come in the box from Edinburgh; and, when they stole furtive glances at each other, his were curious, and hers, under the shadow of her gorgeous Japanese umbrella, were hostile, defiant at least, and thus not without a certain drollery, but few remarks were interchanged of a more exciting nature than that ‘the weather was lovely,’ or ‘the leaves were falling.’

In these days, and for long after, Olive was terribly uncertain in her moods, and to Allan Graham it seemed at times as if she almost disliked him.

When they were alone together, which was seldom, she scarcely spoke to him, and thus his enforced silence disposed her to be more silent still. To Olive the whole situation was one of miserable unrest; she felt that there was something grotesque in it, and she longed intensely to be anywhere else than at Dundargue.

While Allan, admiring her rare beauty, and pretty, petulant ways, was already learning to love her, he found his tongue loaded, as it were, tied up, and his tenderness cramped by the strange tenor of her father’s ill, which made him feel that, love her as he might, that love would never seem pure or without the taint of selfishness.

He had procured for her at Malta a complete suite of gold and pearl-mounted Maltese jewellery, the best that could be found in the Strada San Paoli, costing him more than even he could well afford; but now so cold and repellant was her demeanour, that he had not the courage as yet to present the elaborate trinkets—so rich in fretwork and fine as a gossamer web—so they were left to repose in their purple velvet cases.

Yet his thoughts about her were becoming persistent now. Times there were when he conceived that he would treat her

judiciously but tenderly, and in such a fashion that her feelings must slide into a species of sisterly, or at least cousinly, interest in him ; but then, at these times, a flash of her dark grey-blue eyes cast these intentions to the winds, though Allan began to feel nothing but passionate love for her.

To him, as to her, the situation imparted an awkwardness now, that of course he had never been conscious of when a boy. He did not want the money of his cousin or of anyone else, as he muttered to himself while tugging and twisting his thick, dark moustache ; and thus, with all the tenderness that was growing in his heart for Olive, he often unconsciously adopted towards her a studied courtesy and almost indifferent bearing that somewhat galled her ready pride, and made her think ‘this indifference to me, and the beauty all men ever I possess, can only spring from a love he bears some one else ; and, with that love in his heart, he seems actually ready to conform to the outrageous wishes of papa !’

And more convinced of this suspicion did she become when she found that he evinced no more desire to seek her society than that of his mother or sister ; but this was the result of her own bearing.

Allan was ere long in sore perplexity. The slightest attempt at tenderness she repelled, or seemed to shrink from as a sensitive plant shrinks from the touch ; and, on the other hand, the lack of it seemed to increase her coldness and rouse her sense of pride.

‘What the deuce is the meaning of this ?’ muttered Allan, as he chanced upon a volume one day. It was a very handsome and expensive edition of some of Byron’s poems, which had been given by Hawke Holcroft to Olive as a birthday gift, and on turning over the leaves of which he found innumerable paragraphs and lines pencilled on pages that seemed to fall naturally open, where these marks, all of which referred to love and passion, were most plentiful.

All of these seemed to have been selected with an ulterior view for her perusal and study. Allan knit his brows and tossed the volume to the other side of the table.

‘So, so,’ thought he, ‘Cousin Olive has had a guide for her reading, and the guide is that fellow Holcroft. He has made good use of his time, hang him!’

Olive, who had been watching him under the deep fringes of her eyes, smiled when she saw the action, and, instantly divining the reason of it, resolved not to leave her Byron lying about in future; and now a new mood seized her.

‘Tell me, Allan,’ she said, suddenly looking up from a piece of music she was studying, ‘did you ever think of me at all when you were all these years far away in India?’

‘Have you forgotten what I told you on the evening we met on the lawn?’ said he reproachfully, yet surprised by her taking the initiative in a conversation, especially of this kind. ‘Often, indeed, did I think of you!’

‘How—in what fashion?’

‘As my merry little playmate when I was a mere youth—the droll girl to whom I was somehow tied up under Uncle Raymond’s will.’

‘You phrase it rightly,’ said she, biting her coral nether lip. ‘Tied up; yes, but I won’t be so. Yet you did think of me as a droll little playmate?’

‘Yes; how else could I think of you? Not as the lovely girl I find you now, Olive.’

‘You may know by this time that I hate all flattery,’ said she, blushing hotly at what she had brought upon herself by a blunt reference to an hitherto ignored subject—their mutual relation to each other.’

‘I have here a gift I brought you from India,’ observed Allan timidly, as he unlocked his desk and thought of the Maltese ornaments, but did not dare to refer to them as yet.

‘A gift?’ said she coldly, with face half averted.

‘A little silver idol of Siva, beautifully carved and chased—will you accept of it?’

‘Thanks—with pleasure,’ said she, trembling lest it had been a ring. ‘How curious, and yet how grotesquely hideous it is!’ she added, turning it round, and then balancing it in the white palm of a slim and delicate hand.

‘And rather a curious story attends it—if you care to hear.’

‘Please to tell me,’ said she, her curiosity roused. ‘Why, the funny thing has ever so many heads, and a dozen of arms at least!’

‘We were in cantonments at Hurdwur, in Delhi,’ said Allan, glad to secure her attention even for a few minutes, ‘when a subadar-major of the 10th Native Infantry, a disciple of Siva, wishing to sacrifice to his little idol, placed it by the bank of the river there, which is one of the greatest places for Hindoo purification, and the resort of thousands of pilgrims from every part of Hindostan. While he turned aside to get the ghee with which to anoint it, some person adroitly carried it off. After searching for it in vain, with consternation in his soul, the unfortunate subadar-major went to the priest of the nearest temple, and, with tears in his eyes, related his loss.

“‘Dog!’” exclaimed the priest, “‘you have lost your god, and must prepare to die, for death alone can soothe the wrath of Siva.”

“‘If die I must,” replied the wretched subadar-major, with clasped hands and trembling knees, though a brave man, as the medals on his breast proved, “it shall be by drowning in the holy river; so come with me to the edge thereof, and give me your blessing.”

‘The priest consented, and followed him to the Ganges, into which he went deliberately.

“‘Be courageous, my son—die with joy, and perfect happiness awaits you,” exclaimed the priest.

“‘My dear master,” said the subadar, “before I perish, lend

me *your* god that I may adore it—the water is already up to my neck.”

‘The priest consented, and handed his idol to the subadar-major, who, as if by accident, let it drop in the deep water.

“‘Ah! master,” he exclaimed, as if in horror and dismay, “what a new misfortune! Your god is also lost, and so we must die together—for *you* must drown, too, and go with me to the throne of Siva!”

‘And, approaching the priest, he strove to grasp the hand of the latter, who stood pale and trembling on the lowest step of the ghaut or landing-place.

“‘What trash do you speak!” the priest suddenly exclaimed, in great wrath; “can there be any harm in losing a little image of baked clay, not worth an anna! I have dozens of such in my temple close by; let us each choose one, and keep silence on the subject!”

‘The subadar did so then, but chose this fine silver one, which he bestowed on me for kindness shown to him when dying of a wound received in a skirmish, and I brought it home as a bauble for you, Cousin Olive.’

She placed the idol on the table, and remained silent, while Allan eyed her wistfully.

‘Why is my presence so distasteful to you?’ he asked, after a minute’s pause.

‘Distasteful! Oh! Allan, don’t say so,’ said she, impressed by the pathos of his tone, but for a moment only; ‘it is you who think, or seem to think so.’

‘Olive!’ he exclaimed, a little impatiently and reproachfully as he drew near her.

‘There—there—that will do,’ said she, starting up; ‘don’t bring down the ceiling on me—auntie more than all!’

And she swept from the room, leaving the idol behind her.

Allan sighed with annoyance, and addressed her no more during the whole of that day. She was conscious of this, for she remarked to Lady Aberfeldie in the evening:

‘How odd—how strange Cousin Allan is to me!’

‘Strange?’

‘Yes, aunt.’

‘I know not what you mean, Olive,’ she replied, a little gravely and severely; ‘but to me it seems that *you* are always strange, and not my son, the Master.’

Lady Aberfeldie had a soft but set face of the classic type, with a mouth that, though beautiful and aristocratic, could become very fixed in expression at times, and it seemed so now to Olive; thus that young lady withdrew.

‘Our Allan is young and handsome, noble and most unselfishly in love with her, as I am beginning to hope, Eveline; so what more would Olive Raymond wish for?’ said Lady Aberfeldie to her daughter.

‘She would have that which she has not, mamma—perfect freedom to accept or refuse whom she chose. Unselfish in love I know Allan must be; but that is precisely the point which Olive is left to doubt.’

‘Wherefore?’

‘Through that unlucky will, which makes a kind of bonds-woman of her.’

‘I would to heaven the silly document had never been framed! I have often feared that it might lead to all our attention, care, and affection being misconstrued by her; but Allan might have been sickly, weakly, even deformed, and, with the terms of this will hanging over her, what would she have thought then?’

‘Then, as I have heard her say, the will might be reduced by a court of law.’

At this reply a clouded expression came into the fair, colourless face of Lady Aberfeldie, but just then a servant in the Graham livery, yellow and black, approached with a note on a salver.

‘From papa!’ she said, while cutting it open with a mother-of-pearl knife. ‘Just a line or two to say he will be home in a

couple of days, and is certainly bringing with him Mr. Hawke Holcroft, "the son of his old friend," and that other young detrimental, Stratherroch. He is well-nigh penniless, but, with your papa, to be in the Black Watch is quite equal to a patent of nobility.'

Eveline felt her colour fade, while a sad expression stole over her soft face, and her mother, after glancing at her narrowly, added :

'He also brings our wealthy friend, Sir Paget Puddicombe, the M.P. for Slough-cum-Sloggit, in Yorkshire. You remember him in London last season, and how much he admired you, dear?'

Eveline *did* remember him, and how the rich but elderly baronet's attentions, encouraged by her parents, were the ridicule of her girl friends and the bane of her existence ; yet she only sighed and remained silent, and, passing through a French window, quitted the drawing-room to join her brother, who was smoking a cigar on the terrace, and teasing the peacocks as they sat on the stately balustrade.

He was in rather a similar mood. He felt the demeanour of Olive after the little episode of the idol keenly, and, remembering the pencilled Byron, was, of course, inclined to connect Hawke Holcroft with that demeanour ; so he had certainly become, for a time, cold and constrained in manner to his cousin.

'When was that photo of Olive done?' he asked, rather abruptly.

'The one in the ball dress?'

'Yes.'

'When we were last in Edinburgh ; but I do not remember where the studio was.'

'She gave one to that Mr. Holcroft.'

'I was quite unaware that she did so,' said Eveline, with some annoyance of manner.

'Look here, Eve, if when in London,' grumbled Allan, 'she

shies her photos about in this fashion they will soon be in every fellow's possession, and we may, ere long, expect to find them, like those of professional beauties, on glove and match boxes.'

'What a funny and horrid idea!' said his sister, passing her arm through his and nestling her head on his shoulder, while he, stooping, kissed her *mignonne* face with a smiling caress.

'There is nothing funny about it,' he replied, though, like her, he could little foresee the trouble that unlucky photograph was to cost in the future. 'And, to say the least of it, Olive treats me with almost hostility at times.'

'She does not conceal from me a resentment at her lack of free will.'

'As for Uncle Raymond's arrangements, I would to goodness that he had left all he had to his old housekeeper and her infernal screeching cockatoo with the yellow tuft.'

'Certainly Olive does not seem to be the kind of girl to be disposed of against her wish, Allan; you may read that in the firm tread of her little feet, in the carriage of her head, and the perfect possession of her manner.'

'But surely she may be won—though she will not understand me.'

'I hope she will ere long; but is there not a writer who says, Allan, that while the world lasts the difficulty of women understanding and making allowance for the feelings of men in what pertains to love, "will be probably one of the great sources of darkness and confusion in the social arrangement of things"?''

'What a dear little casuist it is!' said he, as she raised her *petite* figure on tiptoe to kiss his well-tanned cheek; 'but,' he added, 'I am in a state of great uncertainty.'

'Uncertainty can always be ended; but then perhaps how bitterly—how very bitterly,' replied Eveline, who was not without some harrowing thoughts of her own; and something in

her tone caused Allan to regard her soft hazel eyes and sweet shy face with tenderness and inquiry.

‘Of what are you thinking, or of—*whom*?’ he whispered, as his arm went caressing round her, and he stroked her bright, sheeny hair.

‘I may trust you, Allan?’ she said, in a broken voice.

‘To death, *petite*. You are thinking of—of Evan Cameron?’ Eveline sobbed now.

‘Has he spoken of love to you?’ asked Allan, in a low voice, and with a troubled expression in his face.

‘Never; he knows it would be hopeless,’ she replied huskily.

‘Poor Evan! and the governor is bringing him again—a grand mistake. How the deuce is all this to end with us? But don’t sob so, my little darling,’ he added, as he drew her closer to him.

Yet, despite her brother’s sympathy and tenderness, Eveline Graham let her tears flow freely, and he promised to keep her secret that she and Evan Cameron cherished an unspoken and hopeless love for each other; and in a brief space they were to meet again!

Meanwhile, though somewhat relieved by having her brother for a confidant, she was both restless and unhappy. She strolled upon the terrace to feed the peacocks, or wandered listlessly in the garden, going from occupation to occupation, taking up a book—one of Mudie’s last—only to toss it aside; seated herself before the piano, rose then and left it. Anon she resorted to her sketching-block, sorted her colours, selected a brush, only to quit any attempt to work with a hopeless sigh.

CHAPTER VI.—THE CHAGRIN OF LOVE.

LORD ABERFELDIE duly arrived at Dundargue with his three gentlemen visitors, their approach being heralded by the pipes

of Ronald Gair, who was perched on a seat of the game-laden wagonette as it bowled up the avenue.

On the first day of his return the peer was anxious to learn upon what footing the cousins were—if Allan had made a proposal, or ‘even opened the trenches,’ and, if so, with what success. On these points he was enlightened by Lady Aberfeldie, and, though not very much surprised to find matters as they were, he trusted to propinquity and cousingly feeling of intercourse as trump cards in the game, and was sure that all would come right in the end, and before Allan’s leave of absence was out.

There was no selfishness in this desire of Lord Aberfeldie. He had no power to alter the matter as it stood, for if she did not marry Allan if he was willing to marry her, ‘then and in that case,’ as the will had it, her patrimony would be lost even to herself. Allan’s death alone would save it for her.

Great indeed, thought the girl with bitterness, must have been her father’s regard for the house of Aberfeldie !

‘What friends—such lovers we might be but for the confounded plans of that eccentric old fellow !’ was the ever-recurring thought of Allan.

‘You are at least fond of her ?’ said the peer, as he and his son smoked their cigars together on the terrace that overlooked the far-stretching vista of the Carse of Gowrie, then bathed in the ruddy splendour of the setting sun.

‘Fond of Olive ! Yes, as much as she will permit me to be. She is my cousin, of course,’ replied Allan.

‘There is something evasive—doubtful—in your answer ; but you must at some time or other propose to her. You know precisely the terms of her father’s remarkable will.’

‘Yes, and that it hangs like a millstone round the necks of us both, rendering what may be the dearest wish of our hearts liable, perhaps, to the grossest misconstruction. She has more than once told Eveline that to gain freedom of action she would face poverty—anything.’

‘Tuts ! Romantic rant ! Much *she* knows of what poverty is. But why should she even think of facing it ?’

‘To be free and unfettered, as I have said.’

‘Relinquishing to you all that portion of her fortune which does not go to charitable institutions ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Poor girl ! A silly and impetuous threat. But she will think better of it, Allan, by-and-by, and we have fully five years to count upon yet.’

But it did not seem as if the fair Olive was likely to change her mind soon, to judge by her bearing that evening, when, after dinner, the guests and family at Dundargue assembled in the drawing-room.

The repast was over, and thereafter, ere the ladies withdrew, Ronald Gair, with all his drones in order, his Crimean, Indian, and Ashanti medals glittering on his breast, had marched thrice round the table, according to his daily wont, in ‘full fig,’ looking as only a Highland piper or a peacock can look ; and, to the amazement of Sir Paget Puddicombe and the disgust of Hawke Holcroft, winding up ‘The Birks of Aberfeldie’ by several warlike skirls at the back of his master’s chair—the dinner, we say, was over, and the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the stately drawing-room, which was lighted by more than one glittering chandelier.

Lord Aberfeldie, his son, and Stratherroch, as they wore the kilt, had, of course, substituted for their rough shooting-jackets others of black cloth, with the irreproachable white vests and ties as evening costume, and had also assumed their silver-mounted dirks ; while Holcroft and one or two more were *de rigueur* in the funereal attire which a writer calls ‘the butler-suit, the most hideous clothing yet hit upon by our species.’

In that brilliant drawing-room, grouped with well-bred people, were some curious elements of secret doubt and future discord that did not quite meet the eye.

Holcroft hung over the chair of Olive so closely that, at times, the tip of his long and waxed tawny moustache nearly touched her head, while she played with her fan, opening and shutting it listlessly as they conversed in low tones, he adopting a sentimental one, though it was ever his boast that he 'was not one of those fools who hoard by them dried flowers, locks of hair, and all that sort of thing.'

Quietly watched by Lady Aberfeldie, whose lips wore their set expression, Evan Cameron was entirely occupied with her daughter, while Allan seemed quite as intent on a new guest, Miss Logan of Loganlee, a girl possessed of considerable personal attractions; and his father talked politics with Loganlee himself, the parish minister, and Sir Paget Puddicombe, a short, pompous, and squat, but rather pleasant little man, with a prematurely bald head, which he had a way of jerking forward from his neck like a turtle, a rubicand face, two merry eyes, and whose age was rather doubtful, but too old any way for a girl of Eveline Graham's years, though he affected considerable juvenility of manner.

Lord Aberfeldie, who generally about that time, when at Dundargue, was wont to enjoy a quiet little game of chess or bezique with Olive or Eveline, was rather bored by the *empressement* with which the clergyman, Sir Paget, and Loganlee discussed politics and the prospects of the ministry.

The latter, a sombre man, whose air of respectability was almost oppressive, was one of a style of men common enough in Scotland. A small landed proprietor, he had contrived to become M.P. in the Liberal interest for a cluster of Scottish burghs (each of which, if in England, would have had two members), and he was chiefly noted—being 'Parliament House bred'—for neglecting Scottish interests and toadying to the Lord-Advocate, and consequently obtained the usual legal reward, a sheriffship, or something of that kind, with a thousand a year or so.

He seldom opened his mouth, save to talk on politics ; he was tall and thin, with very square shoulders, grizzled, sandy, mutton-chop whiskers, apple-green eyes, and nothing more about him remarkable, save a curious air of perpetual self-assertion, combined, as we have said, with an oppressive one of respectability.

His host began to change the tenor of the conversation by hoping that Sir Paget found his quarters comfortable last night, adding that he occupied 'the Johnson Room.'

'Why is it so called?' asked Sir Paget, jerking forward his bald head.

'Dr. Johnson slept a night in Dundargue when on his famous tour.'

'Of which Boswell makes no mention?' said Mr. Logan inquiringly.

'Because my ancestor did not pay *him* sufficient deference ; and, indeed, I fear we should scarcely ever have heard of the literary bear of Bolt Court and Fleet Street but for that Scotch toady of his. Though he alleged that the most valuable piece of timber in Scotland was his walking-stick, he might have seen some fine trees at the Birks of Aberfeldy. We must ride over there, Sir Paget, and I will show you the cradle of the Black Watch, my old regiment of immortal memory.'

'How?'

'It was first mustered there on the 25th of October, 1739.'

'Ah!' said Sir Paget, who was not so much interested in the matter as the speaker.

Sir Paget was a childless widower, and had been left a noble fortune in many ways, including nearly the whole of Slough-cum-Sloggit, of which his father rose by his own merits to be mayor. He had entered the town a tattered lad, with only a sixpence in his pocket, and, in due time, the sixpence became the basis of colossal wealth. He had been made a baronet by the ministry of the day—no one knew precisely for what ; but the wealth he left behind him gave his son an

interest in the eyes of Lady Aberfeldie he was unlikely to attain in the soft hazel orbs of her daughter.

Sir Paget generally stood with his chest puffed out, reminding one of a pouter-pigeon, his little, fat hands interlaced behind his back, and often as not under the tails of his coat, his round, good-humoured face and twinkling eyes turned up to the faces of those with whom he conversed, as most men, and women too, had the advantage of him in stature.

With a gold pince-nez balanced on his very pug nose, he was what young ladies described as 'an absurd little man' whose tender speeches they laughed at—none more than Eveline—till matters took a serious turn, though he failed to feel the truth of the aphorism, 'Let no lover cherish sanguine hopes when the object of his choice has grown to look upon him in the light of the ridiculous.'

Evan Cameron, we have said, sighed for Eveline; hopeless as his undeclared love had been, the presence of the wealthy English baronet, in conjunction with certain rumours he had heard, made it more hopeless than ever; and, unattractive though Sir Paget's years and figure, he felt intuitively that in him he had a dangerous rival.

When he found that this most eligible *parti* was again on the tapis—one whose name had been associated with that of Eveline in at least one 'society' paper during the last London season, poor Stratherroch's heart sank down to zero. He felt and knew that, with Lady Aberfeldie especially, he was literally 'nowhere' by his want of wealth, though, like a true Highlander, he could trace his lineage back into the misty times of Celtic antiquity; but, aristocratic though she was, the peeress set little store on that.

Eveline Graham seemed as much beyond his reach as the moon. He felt that, for his own peace of mind, he ought to quit Dundargue as soon as possible, yet he clung desperately to the perilous delight of the girl's society.

To all appearance, the pair were simply looking over, almost in silence, a large book of clear-skied and strongly shadowed photos of Indian scenery brought home by Allan, yet both their hearts had but a single thought, and, when the downward glance of his soft grey eyes met hers, she felt that, in spite of herself, there was something in it like a magnetic spell.

Passionate and pleading eyes they were, generous and loving in expression, telling the tale his lips had not yet uttered, and might never do so ; and the girl lowered her white lids as if a weight oppressed them, and the diamond locket on her white bosom sparkled as a sigh escaped her.

A little way off, in something of the same pose, Hawke Holcroft, with a glass in his pale, sinister eye, was hanging, as we have said, over Olive Raymond, doing his utmost in *sotto voce* to fascinate that young lady, while pretending to translate, as suited the occasion and himself, for the edification of his fair listener, the lettering of one of the Chinese or Japanese fans that were strewn about the tables.

Now, Mr. Hawke Holcroft knew nothing about the terms of Mr. Raymond's will, or of the existence of any such document, and might never know. He was only certain that Olive was undoubtedly an heiress ; that he himself was very impecunious, and ere long might be well-nigh desperate ; and so he did not see why he should not, to use his own horsey phraseology, 'enter stakes as well as another.'

Rumour, certainly, had linked the names of the cousins together ; 'but if she is engaged to Graham,' thought the observant Holcroft, 'it is strange that she wears no engagement ring.'

He knew not that, separated as the pair had been almost from childhood, no such little formality as the presentation of a ring could have been gone through ; and *now*, as the Master did not see his way to it as yet, Holcroft was 'scoring,' or thought so.

He was leaving nothing unsaid to enchain her attention. He seemed very clever : at least he could converse fluently on many subjects ; seemed to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything worth seeing, or pretended to have done so—which was most likely.

‘ However they stand, her heart is not in it,’ was his ever-recurring thought ; ‘ and, if so, why the deuce shouldn’t I try my hand ? She has a pot of money—indeed, no end of money, I hear ; but, then, if her noble aunt and uncle have made up their noble minds to pounce upon her as a daughter-in-law, how is she to resist, unless she elopes, if “ Barkis ” (meaning Allan) “ is willin’ ” ? They can make her life a burden to her until she gives in, or—or I run away with her ; and why the devil should I not ? ’

Holcroft was an artful man, and well acquainted with every phase of dissipated life ; he had suave manners, when he chose, and an unexceptionable appearance. With many debts and secret passions, he was cold and selfish ; a man who never made a move in any way without forecast and calculation ; and who might commit a crime if driven to it, but never precisely a folly.

He was closely watching Olive while he conversed with her ; he admired her beautiful person, but still more her ample purse. She dared to trifle with him at times, he thought ; and then, even when looking down upon her satin-like hair, her dazzling white shoulders, and innocent violet eyes with a vengeful feeling, he mentally vowed that he would *compel* her to love him, or accept him, he cared not which, if human will and cunning failed him not !

He had a love—a passion for her, in a strange fashion of his own, yet times there were when he almost hated her for fencing with him ; and little could the soft, bright beauty, who raised her fine eyes from time to time to his and conversed so laughingly with him, have conceived the conflicting emotions

that were concealed in his breast under a smiling exterior, or the shame and agony he was yet to cost her.

Even when he attempted to look loving, there were a cold expression and lack of colour in his eyes, and there was something very significant of an iron will about his lips and powerful chin.

Olive had no warm feeling for Holcroft, and save for the obnoxious will would infinitely have preferred her cousin Allan in the end ; but she affected just then to believe in Platonic friendship (blended with a little judicious flirtation) so firmly that, to pique Allan, she showed a great apparent preference for his would-be rival.

Olive and Holcroft knew that this seeming flirtation was perilous work, and might compromise them both with Lord and Lady Aberfeldie, and with Allan, too, if it attracted attention ; but Holcroft had a game to play. Olive's proud little heart was full of resentment and pique, and then anything with a spice of danger in it is always curiously fascinating.

More than all, Olive was beginning to feel conscious that, under the circumstances, it was strangely awkward to be in the same house with Allan Graham—the intended husband to whom her father had bequeathed her. But whither could she go ?

In more than one instance, in the drawing-room at Dundargue, that night was illustrated the aphorism that language is given us to conceal our thoughts, and much was exhibited of what the French not inaptly term the *chagrin* or peevishness of love.

CHAPTER VII.—LE CHAGRIN D'AMOUR.

ALLAN GRAHAM, with all his quiet and growing love for Olive, seeing how she received him, neither petted her as he was wont to do in his boyhood, nor after a time had attempted any

tenderness with her, but trusted to the progress of events and the necessity for fulfilling her father's wish rather than to his own influence or power of persuasion, aware that she could only become the bride of another, penniless, or nearly so—a circumstance which militated sadly against himself.

But, this assumed coldness and calmness withal, Olive could feel, with a woman's acuteness in such matters, how much the expression of his dark eyes and the tone of his voice changed and softened, unconsciously, when he looked at and addressed her. She was of his own blood, like a sister, whom he might treat with formality or affection, coldly or playfully, according to the occasion or the mood, and whom he might love as much as he liked, or she would permit. Ah! this tender and mysterious tie of cousinship must give him, as he thought, 'a great pull' over Hawke Holcroft and every other man.

On this evening, how handsome she looked, in all her wilfulness! How Allan longed that he might take her in his embrace, to kiss her starry eyes, her peach-like cheek, and sheeny hair with an ardour he had never felt in his boyhood, when he had done so many times; but now, somehow, he dared scarcely think of such a thing, and there was that fellow Holcroft, with all his easy *insouciance*, and with the smile of one who never laughed really in his life, hanging just rather too much over her, with a considerable amount of *empressement* in his eyes and manner, pouring his flowery nothings into her apparently willing ear; and Lady Aberfeldie, who could stand this no longer, became secretly provoked, and opened and shut her fan of heavy mother-of-pearl with such vehemence that the sticks rattled.

And, with the emotions we have described in his heart, Allan, as if the further to play out the game of cross-purposes, in a spirit of pique, doubtless, remained in close attendance on Miss Ruby Logan.

Now the latter was not the heiress of Loganlee, as she had

several brothers; but, even had she been so, it would not have enhanced her value in the ambitious estimation of Lady Aberfeldie.

But Ruby was a very handsome girl, with a skin pure, transparent, and delicate as the lining of a shell, while her fine hair was ample in quantity and of the darkest amber; her eyes large, deep-blue, and fringed by dark lashes. She was large, full in form, and altogether a bright and attractive-looking girl, and Olive felt conscious that she might prove rather a formidable rival if she ever had to view her as such.

Replacing the three daughters of the minister of Dundargue, who had been afflicting the company with much boarding-school Mozart and Chopin, who would have deemed anything national vulgar, to say the least of it, compared with some lachrymose drawing-room ballad, and who in a ditty of great length and mystery, which we quote at second hand, had informed their hearers—

‘Mermaids we be,
Under the blue sea——’

replacing them, we say, Ruby Logan sang to Allan in a rich mezzo-soprano voice, and with a suppressed emotion born perhaps of a coquettish desire to dazzle and please him, as a handsome young fellow of good position, all of which proved a fresh annoyance to my Lady Aberfeldie, who deemed music at times ‘a convenient noise for drowning conversation, and under whose shelter the old people talk scandal and the young people make love,’ and who knew that Miss Logan, like Olive, had that wonderful charm, which is, perhaps, one of the greatest any girl can possess—a lovely and ever-changing expression; and even Allan, as he gazed down into the depths of her dark-blue eyes (while she sang *at* him), and anon glanced furtively at Olive, thought to himself:

‘How the dickens *will* our little game of cross-purposes end?’

Lady Aberfeldie was just then indulging in the same surmise, as, full of watchfulness, she occupied an ottoman in the centre of the inner drawing-room, cresting up her white throat and well-shaped head, looking in her stately beauty like the heroine of some grand old Scottish romance of the days of Montrose or Prince Charles ; for there was something of a past age in her style and bearing, though attired in the latest fashion by a modiste of Princes Street.

In her matronhood Lady Aberfeldie had still that subdued charm which was not now the beauty of youth, yet stood very much in place of it ; but, with all her softness of manner, she was a proud and determined woman, capable of doing much to accomplish a purpose of her own, and the marriage of Eveline to Sir Paget Puddicombe was certainly her purpose at present.

Thinking that it was high time to make some change in the general grouping, the moment Miss Logan's musical performance was done she summoned Allan to her side by a wave of her fan.

'So glad I am that your father, who so often mistakes, invited dear Sir Paget here,' she said, in low voice.

'He is rather a good sort,' replied Allan, in his off-hand way ; 'capital cellar and preserves, I have heard.'

'So rich, and not *very* old ; he always admired Eveline, and she certainly cares for no one else—thus I have great hopes for her, Allan,' she added confidently ; but Allan sighed, he knew better, and recalled the tears of his gentle sister on the terrace, and her half-murmured admissions of deep interest in that winsome young brother-officer whom he loved so well ; and, as he remained silent, his mother spoke again.

'Mr. Holcroft seems to be fairly absorbing Olive ; he has been talking to her quite long enough, and this will not do : ask her to play something at my request, and do you lead her to the piano.'

'We are anticipated,' said Allan, as he saw his sister seat herself at the instrument with young Cameron by her side, busy

among the leaves of her music ; and a shade of annoyance deepened in the face of Lady Aberfeldie as she glanced at her husband, whose eyes were turned also towards the pair, and she knew from personal experience how much may be inferred or deduced from the words of a song, and also how many a tender speech, an accompaniment, however ill or well executed, may conceal.

Lord Aberfeldie, of course, would never consent to Eveline having a suitor with means so limited as those of her young admirer ; but, though the idea of such a contingency had not occurred to him, Lady Aberfeldie was much sharper and more suspicious ; she saw ‘how the tide set,’ and was much opposed to Cameron being even a visitor at Dundargue in any way, as an utter ‘detrimental,’ and declined to see how his being one of ‘Ours’—the Black Watch—altered *that* matter.

And now, after a considerable amount of preluding, much unnecessary whispering, as ‘my lady’ thought, much glancing and many reciprocal smiles, Evan Cameron began to sing, accompanied by her daughter ; and more annoyed became the matron on finding the theme chosen one of love and tenderness that could be, and was, sung with considerable *point*—a now forgotten little Scotch song, which the author adapted to the air of ‘Rousseau’s Dream,’ and, with the desire to excel before the girl he loved better than life, young Cameron gave his whole soul to the lyric.

- ‘ See the moon o’er cloudless Jura
Shining in the loch below ;
See the distant mountain towering
Like a pyramid of snow.
Scenes of grandeur—scenes of childhood—
Scenes so dear to love and me !
Let us roam by bower and wild wood,
All is lovelier when with *thee*.
- ‘ On Jura’s hills the winds are sighing,
But all is silent in the grove ;
And the leaves with dewdrops glistening
Sparkle like the eye of love.

Night so calm, so clear, so cloudless,
Blessed night to love and me ;
Let us roam by bower and fountain,
All is lovelier when with *thee*.'

And it was not unnoticed by Lady Aberfeldie that at the closing word of each verse the eyes of the pair unconsciously met. Ere Eveline could be prevented, she had acceded to Cameron's softly uttered desire that she would sing anything for *him* ; and she frankly did so, throwing into her voice the thrill and tenderness that are sure to come into a girl's utterances when singing to the man she loves. The heart of Cameron responded to this mysterious influence, and, as the girl regarded him furtively from time to time, she thought, with his crisp wavy hair, his clear grey eyes, general expression and bearing, he looked every inch what he was, the descendant of that Sir Evan Cameron of Lochiel who met Cromwell's men in combat under the shadow of Ben Nevis ; yet to other eyes he seemed just a good sample of an infantryman who had across his forehead the genuine sun-mark of his craft, made under the line of his forage-cap by a scorching tropical sun.

And now when Lady Aberfeldie, to stop any more musical performances between these two, prevailed upon Olive to replace her cousin, she was quick enough to detect that the former, displeased or piqued by Allan's apparent attention to Ruby Logan, swept past him with the most subtle little touch of disdain in the carriage of her handsome head.

Now Cameron had once more to give place to pudgy little Sir Paget, who—puffing out his chest and jerking forward his bald shining head—began to do his best to make himself pleasing to Eveline, while the latter, under her mother's watchful eye, was compelled to listen and appear to act with compliance and complacency ; and poor Eveline, like Olive, often felt with some compunction that her mother's general bearing—which a certain quiet yet lofty dignity seemed never to forsake—was more calculated to inspire respect than love.

And Cameron, while he found himself talking rather absently on regimental matters with Lord Aberfeldie, as he looked at Eveline from time to time, was thinking sadly in his honest heart :

‘Oh, what madness it is in me to love her as I do, and how wicked if I lure her into loving me ! Can I expect her ambitious mother or her calculating father ever to view with favour one so penniless as I am ? Would it be honourable in me to profit by her girlish prepossession in my favour, and so preclude her from reaping those advantages of wealth, position, and rank which she is entitled to expect, and to which her parents look forward ? and alas ! as the wife of Sir Paget—if such be her fate—poor Eveline will be lost for ever to me.’

His breast felt torn by such thoughts as these ; and, sooth to say, it is as often amid the splendour and luxury of life, as amid its squalor and poverty, that some of its bitterest tragedies are acted out.

But now the party began to break up—the ladies to seek their respective apartments, and the gentlemen to adjourn for a time to the smoking-room.

As the two cousins, each so different in her style of loveliness, crossed the great apartment, the soft *frou-frou* of their long silken dresses seemed to mingle with their soft laughter and silvery voices. Sir Paget jerked forward his head and remarked to his hostess that ‘they made a charming picture.’

Each had a sore place in her heart, but there was no appearance of it then.

Though resenting the position in which she was placed, and much inclined to resist it, Olive Raymond—such is female caprice—also resented Allan’s having hovered so much about the amber-haired beauty, and, when she bade him adieu for the night, she could not help singing softly, with some point and waggery, as she glanced back at him, the lines of Tennyson’s song :

‘I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care !
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware !
Trust her not, she is fooling thee.’

But whether she applied the words to herself or Ruby Logan it puzzled him to divine.

Olive and Eveline were of an age, and able to sympathise with each other in every thought or fancy. They had grown up together like sisters, Olive, as an orphan, doubtless being the most petted of the two by the household ever since she came a little child to Dundargue, and both were frank, both were open-hearted, and proud of each other’s personal attractions ; and now, dismissing their maids, they brushed out each other’s shining hair that they might have a quiet gossip together.

‘So ends a tiresome night,’ said Eveline, shrugging her white shoulders, which shone like ivory in the light of the toilette candles : ‘a night when the conversation of everyone seemed of a nature so antagonistic, or as if it was all broken up into wrong duets.’

Like her father, Eveline was anxious to discover how the cousins were affected towards each other now ; yet the course of this evening, in which Allan had plainly flirted with Ruby Logan, while Olive seemed to have been engrossed by Mr. Holcroft, did not seem to promise much, and she hinted this pretty plainly.

‘I do think Holcroft loves me, or leads me to infer that he does,’ said Olive, with a soft smile on her downcast face, as she took off her rings, bangles, and bracelets, and tossed them on the marble toilette-table.’

‘And you—what is your feeling for him?’ asked Eveline, with some anxiety in her face and tone ; ‘not love, I hope.’

‘I don’t know what I feel—perhaps it is only a girl’s emotion of gratitude and vanity.’

'I hope it will never be anything more. You scarcely spoke to poor Allan to-night?' said Eveline interrogatively.

'Rather say he scarcely spoke to me! But we are fated to see quite enough of each other, I suppose,' replied Olive, as with slender fingers she coiled and knotted up the silky masses of her rich brown hair. 'How absurd it is,' she added petulantly, 'to think, as I have said a hundred times, that I have a lover cut and dried for me—a *fiancé*—ever since he was in jackets and knickerbockers!'

After a pause, during which she was critically and approvingly regarding herself sideways in the swinging cheval-glass, she said:

'When I heard that he was returning to Dundargue, I was quite prepared to dislike him intensely.'

'Olive!'

'Fact, dear; and since then he must have been sorely puzzled by my various moods towards him.'

'You speak but with truth in this; and yet he seems to have been somewhat the same with you.'

'Poor fellow—but ever so good and kind.'

'And—and you think, Olive dear, that you are beginning to love him as mamma wishes?'

'Nay—nay, I cannot admit that.'

'Even to me?' said Eveline, caressing her.

'Even to you. Did you not see his manner to-night with Ruby Logan?'

'To pique you, if possible, Olive; but when Allan proposes to you, as I am sure he will, and must do——'

'*Must* do!' interrupted Olive. 'Yes—there it is.'

'Well?'

'Then, and in that case, as the will has it, I shall tell him that, however I may esteem and regard him as my cousin, he can never be more, or nearer or dearer, than as such.'

Eveline sighed and smiled; but she told this reply next day

to Allan, and hence he became less in a hurry to bring matters to an issue, though love was growing in his heart nevertheless.

‘Oh, why is it that women cannot speak their minds as men do? I wish I dared run away!’ exclaimed the petulant beauty, beating the carpet with a little impatient foot. ‘To-day I saw two great brown eagles winging their way skyward from the rock of Dundargue; and oh! Eveline, you can’t think how long and wistfully I watched them till they dwindled into tiny specks.’

‘Why?’

‘They seemed such free agents, and, as such, to be envied. They had no wills or last testaments made by others to control their actions—no parents to rule them in the matters of love and marriage.’

‘How droll you are, Olive! To whom but you would such speculations occur? I hope you did not express them to—to——’

‘Allan?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not to Allan.’

‘To whom then?’

‘Mr. Holcroft.’

‘Then, you were very wrong to do so,’ said Eveline, almost severely; ‘he will be certain to draw his own deductions therefrom.’

‘In something else I was, I fear, wrong too.’

‘How?’

‘I permitted him to try one of my gold bangles—one sent me by Allan from Delhi—on his arm, and it would not come off again.’

‘And the bangle?’

‘Is still there,’ said Olive, laughing, but not without a little emotion of alarm.

‘Oh, Olive!’ exclaimed Eveline, with something of dismay, ‘how could you! This is worse than the photo!’

CHAPTER VIII. —THE RIDING-PARTY.

For some time the days passed on as they generally do in a country-house like Dundargue, and there was all the usual flow of life and—with three exceptions, Sir Paget, Holcroft, and Cameron—change of guests and visitors, with the amusements wealth can give.

First came the partridge-shooting, and then the pheasants were to be knocked over, while the ladies drove almost daily to the preserves with the luncheon in the drag or large pony-carriage; there were hunting days, dinners, luncheons, musical evenings, carpet dances, and so forth, and the inevitable lawn-tennis, with the ladies in bewitching costumes; but still Allan, damped perhaps by his sister's communications, 'made no way' with his tantalizing cousin, and Hawke Holcroft, on Lord Aberfeldie's invitation, was still lingering at Dundargue.

To Allan, Olive had become a part of his life, and each day seemed only to begin when he met her at breakfast in her charming morning toilette, fresh from her bath and the hands of Mademoiselle Clairette, her hair dressed to perfection, and her face radiant with health and beauty.

'How often do I wish she had not a sou!' sighed Allan. 'Then she might learn that I love her for herself alone.'

The curious position in which they were placed relatively made the cousins most strange to each other, involving much constraint.

'They are fencing with their feelings,' was Lord Aberfeldie's conviction.

To Evan Cameron, however, it was evident that Holcroft was 'making all the running he could' during Allan's absences after the game, or apparent occupation with laughing Ruby Logan, while it became evident to Sir Paget and more than one other guest, that he got up many a quiet game at *écarté*—

that most rooking of all games—and many a match at billiards after the ladies had retired ; and it was soon remarked by the same close observers that he was a singularly successful player, often pocketing large sums, seldom losing, and then very slenderly, as if to keep up appearances.

At Dundargue he felt himself in clover ! He knew, or was aware instinctively, that neither Lady Aberfeldie nor the Master cared much about him ; but he also knew that his host was inspired by the kindest feelings towards him as the only son of an early friend and gallant old Crimean comrade who had gone to his long home.

If any rule governed the erratic life of the horsey and gambling Holcroft, it was that of resolutely shutting his eyes against to-morrow, and letting it take care of itself ; and now that there was a prospect of winning a wife with money—and such a chance seldom came his way—could he but play his cards well and surely his fortune would be made !

He was a mass of absolute selfishness—the result either of his innate nature or of his nomadic habits. A life-long bankrupt, he had been ever readier to borrow than to lend, to smoke any other fellow's cigars than his own, and to take every advantage of the honourable and unsuspecting.

Such was the perilous inmate which a mistaken sense of kindness, gratitude, and hospitality had induced Lord Aberfeldie to make one of the family circle at Dundargue during the shooting season ; and to whom the advent of the bangle—which, though it slipped easily upon his wrist, most mysteriously would not come off it—and other adventitious circumstances, the real cause of which he did not know, gave a considerable amount of what he termed to himself 'modest assurance' and confidence of ultimate success.

'I should like to come into a nice little pot of money—a fortune, if you will—but *not* with a girl tacked to it,' he said, on one occasion, to throw Allan 'off the scent,' as he thought.

‘I am neither domestic nor ambitious. A few thousands would do.’

‘And make you content?’

‘Content! I should feel as happy as more than once I have been at Monaco, when I have seen the croupier’s rake pushing a jolly pile of gold across the *trente-et-quarante* table towards me, by Jove.’

It did not occur to him that by little speeches like this and anecdotes about his own acumen in the betting-ring, he let a little light in upon the general tenor of his past and present life, and, all unconscious that Sir Paget and others listened with slightly elevated eyebrows, he would produce a sealskin cigar-case of portentous dimensions, draw therefrom a great Rio Hondo cigar, and, after carefully manipulating it, begin to smoke it with intense satisfaction.

Hawke Holcroft, like Mr. Micawber, was always waiting for something to ‘turn up’ in the way of good for himself, and now thought he had found that something in Olive Raymond—an heiress free, he deemed, to choose for herself—free to be wooed and won; and on a day when she proposed a riding-party to visit Macbeth’s Castle of Dunsinane, he very nearly had the hardihood to learn his fate—in the words of Montrose’s song, to put it ‘to the touch, to win or lose it all.’

Drives, riding-parties, and rambles to visit artistic bits of scenery and the rural lions, the neighbourhood afforded every opportunity to those who wished to cultivate each other’s society at Dundargue, and the expedition proposed by Olive to visit the ruins of the usurper’s castle proved the occasion of Mr. Hawke Holcroft’s attempt to advance his own interests.

Whatever Lady Aberfeldie’s views were, her husband had never been called upon to fulfil the duties of a vigilant guardian or parent, and to study the difference between ‘detrimentals’ and married parties, so he left the guidance of the whole affair in the hands of Allan, and remained closeted with his solicitor.

By judicious manœuvring, Holcroft contrived to pair off with Olive, while Allan thus became the escort of Ruby Logan, and Eveline, of course, fell to Sir Paget, who soon found the truth of the vulgar adage about two being company, etc., on their being joined by Stratherroch.

It was a clear and brilliant day early in October, when the blue sky was flecked by fleecy clouds, and the far-stretching scenery of the fertile Carse, overlooked by the long chain of heights, named the Sidlaw Hills, lay steeped in sunshine.

The parks of Dundargue, with their broad acres of velvet-like turf, their stately oaks and towering beeches, among the gnarled branches of which legions of gleds were cawing to each other, and brown squirrels were gliding to and fro; their hedges of ancient thorn, and others where the hawthorn berries showed red, and the wild roses were blooming—the parks, we say, were left behind, with all their groups of deer, and the party, certainly a merry and a well-mounted one, accompanied by the staghounds Shiuloch and Bran, careering joyously on either hand, followed by a couple of splendidly horsed grooms, cantered along the highway, and ere long broke or fell into that slow and ambling pace which is suited for conversing with ease. And Holcroft, who was well versed in all horsey details, and had a very appreciative eye, could see that his fair companion's *tout ensemble*, her riding costume, her hat, veil, and gauntlets were all perfect, from the coils of brown glossy hair to the little foot that rested firmly in its tiny stirrup of burnished steel; and that foot was indeed a model—arched, small, and always full of character in its elasticity of tread; and, more than all, intoxicated by the ambient air, the sunshine, her own high spirits, and the pleasure of being mounted on her own favourite pad, Olive Raymond was looking her brightest and her best.

He had, while engaging all her attention in conversation, contrived, unknown to her, by the pacing of his horse, to leave

the trio referred to at some distance behind ; while, luckily for him, Allan Graham, lured on by Ruby Logan—who was something between a flirt and a hoyden—had gone ahead with her suddenly at a hand gallop, and now the pair were out of sight.

There could be no engagement, despite all rumour thereof—not even a passing fancy—between the cousins, was now Holcroft's conviction, and of his own ultimate success with Olive he began to have little doubt, could he but warily mould her to his purpose ; and already in fancy he saw her thousands—how many there were he knew not—firmly in his grasp.

Though swallowed up by mortgages, his place in Essex—or the few acres that nominally still remained to him there—caused the retention of his name among the 'landed gentry of England,' and he based much upon that circumstance as aiding his designs on Lord Aberfeldie's ward, to whom he had sometimes dropped glowing hints of possessions that were not nor ever had been his.

Something undefined in Olive's manner rather encouraged him on this day. She, to show that she resented the apparent indifference of Allan as being a 'laggard in love,' even while resenting the tenor of that family compact which was meant to bind them together, was disposed to flirt with Holcroft, out of pique rather than precise preference, and to annoy Allan.

With the latter present now, Holcroft became at times a species of difficulty to Olive. During a past season in London there had been sundry, not exactly love-passages, but little coquettings and lingerings in conservatories that nearly amounted to such ; and he, in ignorance of the footing in which she was regarded by the family, was quite inclined, penniless as he was, or nearly so, to revive, if not improve, past relations ; and this had been his object from the first day he came to Dundargue.

And now 'that muscular idiot, the Master,' as he was in the habit of mentally calling Allan, having cantered out of sight,

he addressed himself more fully to his companion and the matter in hand.

‘I enjoy town to the full—none can do so more—when I am there, but I love—oh, I do love—the country!’ replied Olive, in reply to a remark of Holcroft’s about their last London season.

‘It is always very romantic, of course, and all that sort of thing.’

‘And with pleasant people about one, the country becomes so delightful for a time; and then we girls have such perfect freedom here.’

‘Even an escort is not necessary at times.’

‘Unless in the park—beyond that I always like to have one,’ said Olive.

‘Are you pleased to have *me* for one?’ he asked, in a low voice, and pretty pointedly.

‘Of course,’ she answered frankly.

‘How charming to be at hand in case of danger!’

‘What possible danger?’ asked Olive, with surprise.

‘Oh, the untimely appearance of an infuriated stag or the proverbial mad bull of the three-volume novel.’

‘Why not a brigand or a Bengal tiger?’ said Olive, laughing; then suddenly becoming grave, she added—‘But, by the way, talking of Bengal, please to give me back my bangle.’

‘Why?’

‘Simply because I cannot permit you to retain it,’ she replied, little foreseeing to what the natural request might lead.

‘Do not deprive me of it!’ he urged, softly and entreatingly.

‘Why?’ asked she, in return; ‘for what reason. It is impossible—what may people say?’

‘What they please, if seen, which it never shall be.’

‘What might they not think?’

‘Oh, what does it matter?’ he urged again, with much would-be sadness and tenderness.

‘Little to you, perhaps, but much to me,’ retorted Olive; ‘but I do not choose that aught should be either thought or said about it. We shall certainly be accused of flirting.’

‘No, no, Miss Raymond—oh, no, Olive——’

‘Olive!’ she repeated, in a startled manner.

‘Pardon me—none could ever accuse *me* of flirting with you—that were an impossibility—for deeper thoughts——’

‘My bangle, please, Mr. Holcroft, and at once!’ she said imperatively, in dread of what more he might say.

She held forth her hand, but the trinklet either would not come off his wrist, or he pretended that such was the case. Olive tried to remove it, but in vain, and glanced round her, red with vexation. Her hand was gloved, otherwise she would have felt how unpleasantly cold and clammy were the fingers of her would-be lover.

‘Allow me to retain it, even for a time—though would that I might wear it in my grave—for a time, in memory of the darling hopes I have dared to cherish,’ he whispered, in a manner there could be no mistaking now.

‘Spare me this melodramatic sort of thing, Mr. Holcroft,’ said Olive, growing rather pale; ‘I cannot—must not listen to you.’

‘Why—what do you mean?’

‘That there are obstacles between us, even were there not the want of liking,’ she replied decidedly, but with an agitated voice.

‘Obstacles?’ he repeated, inquiringly, sadly, and certainly with an air of *disappointment*; ‘am I now to understand that you are engaged to the Master of Aberfeldie, as these absurd Scots people call him?’

Olive bit her ruddy nether lip at this home question, but made no reply.

‘What enigma is this? You either are or you are not. If *not*, why may not I——’

‘I dare not listen to this style of conversation,’ interrupted

Olive, with positive annoyance; 'and you have no right to force it upon me.'

'After all that has passed?' said he reproachfully, and rather feeling as if his hopes were melting into air.

'I do not understand you,' replied Olive, whose conscience certainly did reproach her.

'If I force this conversation—' he began in a bitter and rather upbraiding tone, then pausing; 'pardon me if I offend,' he resumed, with what seemed growing sadness, while attempting to touch her hand, yet withdrawing his own in apparent timidity. 'But am I wrong in deeming your engagement—or alleged engagement, as rumour says, made when you were a child—one in which your woman's heart and wishes have not been consulted? Tell me—for I may have to leave Dundargue soon now.'

She was in some respects but a weak girl; he a crafty and wily man of the world; and, though he knew it not in the least, he was touching her on a very tender point—yet she replied, firmly enough:

'You have no right to question me; but say, what has Allan done to you that your face should darken at the mention of his name? Is he not your friend?'

'He was.'

'And now——'

'He is no longer so.'

'Why?'

'He is my rival.'

She coloured to her temples at this blunt reply, and all it inferred.

'I loved you long before you ever cared for me,' he resumed coolly.

'Sir—how dare you say I ever cared for you?' exclaimed Olive, her cheeks aflame now; 'let this subject cease, and be resumed no more!'

‘It breaks my heart to hear you speak thus.’

‘Hearts don’t break nowadays, even in such romantic places as Dundargue,’ said she, with a sharp little laugh; ‘and here this matter ends.’

He bowed in silence; but, fatally perhaps for Allan’s interests and her own, she thought, and her vanity was flattered by the idea:

‘Holcroft loves me, despite the tenor of papa’s will—loves me for myself, of course; while Allan *knows* its value to himself! Surely there is a difference in this!’

But it was precisely because Holcroft knew neither of the will nor its spirit that he took the courage to address her as he did. Had he done so, that enterprising gentleman would speedily have ‘dropped out of the hunt,’ and, so far as he is concerned, we should then have no story to tell.

Meanwhile he did not lose heart, and thought he had only to wait the fulness of time for the certainty of winning her, and with her, wealth—of joy or happiness he took no heed at all.

By this time, greatly to Olive’s relief, Eveline and her two swains had overtaken them, and so the matter dropped, though the minds of both, from two points of view, were full of it. She would now have to endure the double annoyance of being daily in the society of a lover who had addressed her as such, and of an *intended* lover who had scarcely yet approached the subject!

And, for some reason only known to herself, she did not tell Eveline, though her bosom-friend, of what had passed between herself and Holcroft. The latter, however, still retained the golden bangle on which her name was engraved; but for a time now there was something in her manner little to the liking of Hawke Holcroft—full as he was of dreams of her, or of her fortune rather—of the risks he ran, and the shifts to which he might be put ere he handled it.

CHAPTER IX.—THE PICNIC AT DUNSINANE.

AMBLING on together and urging their horses, but at an easy pace, they soon drew near the object of their destination—Macbeth's famous castle of Dunsinane—whither the portly old butler, Mr. Tappleton, had preceded them in a waggonette freighted with a luxurious luncheon; and, leaving their cattle in charge of the grooms, they began the ascent of that peak of the Sidlaw Hills which has been immortalized by Shakespeare.

With her riding-skirt thrown over her left arm, Eveline acted as their guide, and it may easily be supposed that she solicited the assistance of Cameron's arm, rather than that of Sir Paget Puddicombe, who had quite enough to do in assisting himself up a path which proved to him, as he said, 'rather a breather.'

It was a winding road cut in the rock, all the other sides being steep and difficult of access, and ere long, on reaching the flat and fertile summit, which commands a magnificent view of Strathmore and Blairgowrie, they found themselves within the strong rampart and deep fosse of what has once been a great military station of oval form, two hundred and ten feet long by one hundred and thirty broad; and there they found Allan and Ruby Logan, who had preceded them, in full possession of the highest point, whence he was directing her attention to the chief features in the scenery, including, of course, Birnam Wood, fifteen miles distant, 'The Lang Man's Grave,' a great stone, under which Macbeth is said to lie—Ruby the while clinging to his arm in the exuberance of her delight, and carrying her riding-hat in her hand, as she was quite aware that her hair alone, in its wonderful luxuriance, made her very attractive, it being an unruly mass of rich, rippling golden amber in hue, shot with a redder and brighter tint at times when the sunlight struck it.

Under the splendour of a glorious noon, while a soft breeze

rippled the verdant grass, the luncheon was proceeded with ; fowls were dissected, pies investigated, champagne and hock, cool from the ice-pails, uncorked ; all the requisites for a merry party were there, and yet in the party itself the chief element of high spirits was wanting, unless in the instance of Ruby Logan, who began to flatter herself that she had made—or nearly so—a conquest of the Master of Aberfeldie.

Oppressed with the tenor of the conversation that had so recently passed between herself and Mr. Holcroft, Olive Raymond was unusually silent and, for her, *distracte* ; and he, remembering the somewhat decided ‘snub’ she had so unexpectedly given him, was somewhat silent too, but sought consolation in champagne, while listening rather abstractedly to Sir Paget Puddicombe descanting on the traditions of the neighbourhood, as, in guide-book fashion, he knew all about the predictions of the weird sisters, the defeat and death of the usurper, and was full of the probability that the great dramatist had visited Dunsinane in person.

But Holcroft only quaffed his liquor, tugged his tawny moustache from time to time, and listened with an air of boredom, mingled with a quizzical expression of mistrust in his pale grey shifty eyes.

He had seen Macbeth on the stage, of course, and endured him more than once ; but of the Thane of Cawdor he knew no more than what he had seen of him behind the footlights, and had cared to learn no more ; and now it was with some genuine Cockney bewilderment, as he looked at the massive trenches around him, he began to think that ‘some such fellow had existed then.’

Eveline and young Cameron, under Sir Paget’s eye, were both reserved and *triste*, and no wine seemed capable of rousing animation in the lover. He had but one thought—the end of his leave was approaching, and when he left Dundargue he might never again see Eveline Graham. His heart was heavy.

When the trio were riding together, it was not that the eyes of Eveline disappointed him, or that she did not converse with him fully and earnestly ; but he had detected in the manner of Sir Paget a provoking air of proprietary and confidence with regard to her that keenly piqued him, and could only have been born, he rightly conjectured, of some recent confidential arrangement with Lord Aberfeldie ; but the young girl herself was sweetly unconscious of it all.

His responses had been brief, and he had ventured on few remarks, aware that little would escape unnoticed ; thus he had been somewhat silent, while Sir Paget's easy-going old roadster ambled between the horses of himself and Eveline, going pace for pace, Sir Paget's head at each jerking forward in turtle fashion.

The trio still remained together when seated on the grass at luncheon, for neither of the gentlemen was disposed to quit the side of Eveline, whose colour might have been noticed to heighten at a question Sir Paget asked Cameron, of whom he certainly had a certain jealousy.

‘Where does your property of Stratherroch lie, Mr. Cameron?’

‘In Inverness-shire.’

‘Ah!—mountainous, of course—good shooting for those who care for such things—not that I do. Is the land very remunerative now?’

‘To others—not to me,’ said Cameron, a little bitterly. ‘A fair inheritance would be mine, Sir Paget, were Stratherroch unencumbered. My father was a wild fellow in his day—as what Highland laird is not? How some acres were mortgaged in succession, how others went *in toto*, Heaven only knows—I don't. The estate is at nurse now ; one day it will be mine again—but not for years ; and I was too long foolishly sentimental about it.’

‘How?’ asked Sir Paget.

‘I thought I would rather that the manor-house fell to ruins than pass, even temporarily, into the possession of strangers—

of others than a Cameron ; and now, by Jove ! it has been for years occupied by one Jones Smithson, of Manchester.'

'Whose rental is clearing it ?'

'Yes ; and meantime I have little more in this world than my claymore and commission in the Black Watch,' said Cameron, with a somewhat hollow laugh and a swift, sad glance at Eveline ; while Sir Paget smiled complacently as he thought of the balance at *his* bankers and the fat, unfettered acres that lay round Slough-cum-Sloggit.

'I hope you do not find Dundargue dull, Sir Paget ?' said Eveline, to change a conversation that rather oppressed her, as she was sharp enough to divine the thoughts of both men.

'Assuredly not, Miss Graham ; how could it be so when I am enabled to renew my intimacy with one who can cast, as it were, bright sunshine in the most shady place ?' he replied, with an unusual jerk of his head, a glance of eye, and accentuation of voice that annoyed her greatly, while Cameron's lip quivered under his moustache with mingled irritation and amusement.

And now at luncheon, inspired by a few bumpers of Clicquot, Sir Paget's glances at Eveline took occasionally the fashion of grotesque and languishing leers.

The wealthy baronet was older than she by a great many years, but they by no means warranted him being safe from a love, or passion rather, that might prove cruel as the grave—the passion of a middle-aged man for a very handsome young girl, whose parents were fully disposed to further his views and their own. It has been said that 'people for the life of them cannot be said to believe in the love-pangs of a man over forty, or of a woman over twenty-nine,' but people may at times be wrong.

The present epoch was rather a trying one to Cameron and Eveline. As she had admitted to Allan, she knew that he loved her with a love unselfish and unspoken : and he felt

intuitively that he was far from indifferent to her—knew it by the indescribable, untaught, and nameless signs by which a man learns instinctively that a woman loves him—in a first passion, a most intoxicating conviction; yet circumstances blended the happiness of Cameron with much that was alloy.

To avoid attentions or would-be tender speeches that might annoy poor Cameron, Eveline found herself compelled to talk intently to Sir Paget about local traditions and superstitions, and, thanks to her old nurse Nannie, she had—for a fashionable young lady of the present day—a curious *repertoire* of stories about wraiths and warnings, *Daione Shi* and other fairies, who were wont in pre-railway times to haunt the corries, cairns, and rocks.

‘Have you no ghosts in or about Dundargue?’ asked Sir Paget. ‘A grand old mansion is scarcely complete without some such spectral visitor.’

‘Surely that oubliette, whatever it is, of which I have heard more than once, must contain something of the kind?’ said Holcroft, in a covert but detestable kind of sneering tone, which he could adopt when his own interests were not concerned.

‘In the gallery that leads to it I have heard of something strange,’ said Allan.

‘Oh, do tell us—what is seen there?’ exclaimed Ruby Logan.

‘Nothing—but old servants have a story to the effect that if anyone remains long there,’ replied Allan, laughing, ‘they are certain to have a strong sense of shadowy forms—intangible presences—hovering near them, and dare not turn their heads to see what they are.’

‘We have no decided ghosts, thank Heaven!’ said Eveline, laughing, and all unconscious of Holcroft’s manner. ‘There are none even in the palaces of Holyrood or Falkland, where terrible things have been done, so why should there be in poor old Dundargue? But a spot close by where we are now lunching is the alleged scene of a curious event—a very dark tradition in our family history.’

‘Why recur to a story so absurd?’ said Allan.

But she was pressed to explain herself, and with a shy, sweet smile in her eyes as she glanced from time to time at Evan Cameron, and a wonderfully musical modulation of voice, she told her tale, but not quite as old nurse Nannie had told it to her.

‘The deep, rocky dell that lies between this and Dundargue, a few miles distant, was ever in past times what we find it now, covered with dense forest-trees, mingled with alders and silver birches so thickly as to exclude the rays of the sun, and it was said to be the haunt of a Urisk or mountain-goblin—a species of fiend which, Sir Walter Scott says, tradition avers to have had a figure half-man and half-goat.’

‘In short, the Grecian satyr of classical antiquity,’ said Allan, laughing.

‘Be that as it may, the existence of this particular Urisk was never fairly proved until the days of one of our ancestors, Malise Graham of Dundargue, who fought at the battle of Ben Rinnes against the Reformers, and had in hiding in the ‘Priest’s Hole,’ as it is still called, in the keep, a wandering Scottish Benedictine, known only as James of Jerusalem.

‘Now, Malise Graham had an only daughter, Muriel, a girl possessed of that rare and soft beauty——’

‘Which is still the inheritance of her family,’ said Sir Paget, with a most portentous jerk of his head.

‘Please not to interrupt me, or I shall stop,’ exclaimed Eveline, with unconcealed annoyance. ‘Muriel, in her walks near Dundargue, had made—unknown to her family—the acquaintance of a handsome young stranger of winning manners and prepossessing appearance.

‘In the secluded life led in those days by a maiden of rank, such an event was of deep and peculiar interest; love speedily became the sequel, and in truth the object of it seemed to have been a very lovable fellow. Thus it was, with many

Litter tears, that one evening she told him that her frequent absence from home had been remarked, and she must meet him no more in that wooded hollow, especially as it was the haunt of goblins and other evil spirits.

‘On hearing this, the handsome stranger laughed till all the dell seemed to re-echo, caressed her tenderly, and, after urging her on peril of her truth and soul to come to the trysting-place at least once again, left her in haste, as some one was seen to approach them.

‘This proved to be James of Jerusalem, who is still remembered as the black priest of Dundargue. He wore nothing that was canonical ; to have done so would have been as much as his life was worth in those days ; thus he was clad in a sable Geneva cloak and doublet, with falling bands, and a calotte cap of black velvet with long lappets.

‘He looked deadly pale, and was trembling in every limb, while he crossed himself again and again, and said, in a low and agitated voice, “Child Muriel, who is he that left you in such hot haste just now ?”

‘But Muriel,

“Crimson with shame, with terror mute,”

terror of her father, who was a stern and rigid man, remained silent.

‘“Speak, unhappy girl !” urged the priest.

‘“I know not his name,” she replied faintly.

‘“Why ?”

‘“He conceals it from me.”

‘“And why ?”

‘“I know not ; but oh, father, guide and counsel me, for I love him dearly, as he loves me.”

‘“You must meet him——”

‘“Once again,” she urged piteously.

‘“Never more, I meant to say—never more. But why say you once again ?”

“I have promised on my soul’s peril.”

“On your soul’s peril indeed!” groaned the priest, in great tribulation; but, in defiance of all he could urge, Muriel, though she lived in an age of dark superstition, of omens and dread, inspired by her love, stole forth at the usual hour and entered the dell to meet her lover, for the last time, as it proved.

Perhaps it was a prevision of this that made the wood seem so dark and gloomy, and even the knots and gnarled branches of the trees to look like those in the forest to Undine—fiendish faces and freakish limbs.

Muriel knew in her heart that such meetings were wrong, unbecoming to her position, and sinful because she concealed them; but a spell seemed upon her, and she could not resist it. She took no heed of the future; she had but one thought, to be again with him.

“And oh! why should this meeting be our last one?” she wailed in her heart, as he drew her to him, looking so handsome the while in his black doublet slashed with red, his ruff and scarlet plume.

“My own!” said he caressingly; “my own, I am aware that yonder dotard, fool, and knave, the mass-monger, has been seeking to influence your mind against me, and to part us.”

“And here he stands prepared to do so!” exclaimed the black priest, as he suddenly appeared beside them, his eyes sparkling, but strangely with fear, rage, and triumph mingling in their expression. Muriel’s lover clasped her to his breast, and wrapped his scarlet mantle round her. Then, while his eyes glared with a fire which fortunately she did not see, he exclaimed, “Stand back, canting liar—stand back, and begone!”

“Child Muriel, come to me, in the name of God!” cried the priest, in sore agony; but she still clung to her lover, who, at the name uttered, cowered and shrank as in the opera we see Mephistopheles cower and shrink before the cross-hilted swords of the soldiers.

‘“Muriel, Muriel, you are mine !” exclaimed her lover, attempting to lift her from the ground.

‘“Take heed, child, ere it is too late,” urged the priest.

‘“Dare you advise ?” asked the stranger mockingly ; “doe not one day judge another ?”

‘“Yes, and the last day judges all—even such as you !” cried the Benedictine ; then, making a sign of the cross in the air, he exclaimed, “In nomine Patris et Filii ; et Spiritus Sancti !”

‘Scarcely had he done so when, under the power of his exorcism, the mantle, ruff, and plume of the pretended knight turned to bracken leaves, his goblin chain to wild holly, and he stood forth in all his deformity, a horror to the eye, half man and half goat, with the face of a baffled and exasperated fiend—the Urisk, or wood goblin ; and, with a malignant yell, he vanished down the fast-darkening dingle !’

‘And Muriel ?’ asked Holcroft, who had listened to all with such a smile as his face might be expected to wear.

‘Was saved, of course,’ said Eveline.

‘And lived happy ever after ?’

‘Well—content at least, let us hope. She died a nun in the house of the English Benedictines at Paris—now the convent of the Val de Grace.’

‘And has this legend a moral ?’ asked Holcroft mockingly.

‘Of course it has,’ answered Allan rather bluntly, yet with a quiet smile ; ‘it gave a good hint to the girls at Dundargue to beware of the attentions of unaccredited strangers.’

Holcroft’s colour changed for a moment, and not unnoticed by Allan ; for perhaps, reading between the lines, all this seemed somewhat a parable to the former, who tugged at his yellow moustaches in a way he did when irritated, heedless that pomade hongroise was disastrous to straw-coloured gloves.

The angry gleam that crossed the eyes of Holcroft was also noticed by Evan Cameron, who, for some reason as yet only

known to himself, could not abide him ; though certainly the latter did not cross *him* by any attentions to the penniless Eveline Graham.

Her little tradition came as a pleasant interlude to nearly all, for save Sir Paget—always confident and genial—no one seemed quite at ease, as a sense of cross-purposes brooded over them.

‘Tappleton,’ cried Allan to the butler, ‘another glass of champagne all round ; and then be off,’ he added, swinging Olive adroitly into her saddle, and thus, as he thought, anticipating Holcroft, though the latter, remembering keenly his recent ‘snub,’ had no intention of offering his services just then.

Allan, fearing that he had gone rather too far with Ruby Logan in attempting to pique his cousin, now resolved to leave that young lady to the care of anyone else in their homeward ride, much to her surprise and disappointment, and took his place by the side of Olive, in obedience to a half-inviting glance she gave him.

He and his sisters were, of course, familiar since childhood with the ruins of Dunsinane and all their surroundings ; but to two or three of the party, as they turned to depart, and saw the vast ramparts reddened by the setting sun, there came to memory the scene they had so often witnessed on the stage—Malcolm’s army with the boughs of Birnam in their helmets, the ‘alarms and excursions,’ the fierce and protracted melodramatic combat, the downfall of Macbeth beneath the sword of Macduff, and the cries of ‘Hail, King of Scotland—King of Scotland, hail !’

CHAPTER X.—THE GOLDEN BANGLE.

A WRITER says ‘there is the beauty of youth, and surely there is the beauty of love, too,’ and the latter certainly shone in the soft eyes of Eveline Graham as she caracoled her horse in the

homeward ride by the side of young Cameron, and her eyes, which were ever the mystery of that face, had now their sweetest smiles for him. She saw how his face was lighted up, and was aware how his voice softened when he addressed her as it softened to no other woman ; and yet, withal, though no word of love had passed between these two, right well did they know the secret of each other's hearts ; but poverty fettered his tongue, and her parents' ambition and known wishes nearly repressed all hope in the heart of Eveline.

With all her regard for her father she had a fear of him, and still more so of her mother. All their prejudices were in favour of wealth ; but Evan Cameron appeared to her altogether so dear and irresistible that she, poor girl, could not imagine any one being proof against him, and with this conviction, and the knowledge that Allan loved him, she permitted herself occasionally to live in a kind of fool's paradise, wherein Sir Paget Puddicombe had no part.

When her mother was not present, she played to Evan Cameron, and sang his favourite songs ; she showed him her drawings for hints and suggestions, discussed her favourite books, and let him hang over her chair ; and at such times, though nothing of love was said, there was a subtle tenderness in Cameron's eye and voice that made her impulsive heart quicken, as no man's eye or voice had ever done before, and, young though she was, Eveline had heard more than one declaration of love.

And now for a time he had the joy of having her all to himself, as they contrived to distance the rest of their party.

But what availed it ? Evan knew that, if once he passed beyond what appeared to be the merest friendship, his visit to Dundargue might come to a speedy end, and its hospitality could never be extended to him again.

To Evan, Eveline Graham proved, if we may say so, a kind of revelation after the rough life he had led of late years in India—something from another world, as it were—and thus much

of adoration mingled with his love for her. If dying could have served Eveline, there and then would Evan Cameron have died for her!

Whether such enthusiastic passion might last it was impossible to say, but time may show.

We have referred to the quiet confidence of Sir Paget Puddicombe—a confidence born of his consciousness of wealth and assured position. However, he was sharp enough to see to some extent how Cameron was attracted by Eveline, and to feel how the latter preferred the young subaltern's society to his own; but in a very short time he knew that the 'detri-mental,' as Lady Aberfeldie called him, would be again with his regiment, the Black Watch, perhaps under orders for foreign service; then he would have the course all to himself, and doubted not, as Holcroft would have said, 'to win in a canter.'

Cameron thought the proverb right about there being no fool like an old one; but then every old fool had not Sir Paget's bank-book, and the preference and influence of parents to back up his folly. But with a handsome figure, and his V.C., how much more was Cameron like the object of a young girl's eye than Sir Paget could ever be!

'It was in the Kurram Pass, in Afghanistan, that you gained the Victoria Cross, Mr. Graham?' said Eveline, breaking a pause in the conversation, and shortening her reins, while he checked the pace of his horse, and replied, with a pleased smile:

'Yes; but how do you know that, Miss Graham—from your brother, the Master?'

'No.'

'I have never spoken of it.'

'I read it in the "Army List,"' replied Eveline candidly, and to hear her say so made the bronze cross of more value to him than the Garter would have been.

She had read it, and committed the episode to heart too—how 'the Queen had been graciously pleased to signify her

intention of conferring the decoration of the Victoria Cross' on Lieutenant Evan Cameron, of the —th Foot, and now of the Black Watch, for a daring act of bravery on a date given, when the retreating forces were attacked by Afghans in great strength, the latter having pushed forward upon the position at day-break, and Lieutenant Cameron, accompanied by only five soldiers, captured a nine-pounder gun, shooting down or bayoneting all the gunners, and thus preventing the destructive use of the piece, which he brought off with the loss of one man, but in the conflict received three severe tulwar wounds.

Cameron was an enthusiast in his profession, and with outwardly the air of a well-bred man of the world, and thoroughly so that of a young Line officer, he had in his nature a deep sentiment of nationality, of clanship, and Highland romance, with an intense pride in his regiment. He had entertained Eveline often with sketches, anecdotes, and traditions of the Black Watch, but of himself and his V.C. of course he never spoke.

'What a proud moment it must have been for you, when you knew that you had won the cross!' said the girl, with a flush on her soft cheek.

Stirred in his soul by the interest she took in him, the great secret of his heart was trembling on his lips, but he repressed it, and a shadow came into his face and a wistfulness into his eyes.

'Prouder would I have been, Miss Graham,' said he, 'if—if—I——'

'What?'

'I had then been known even by name to *you*,' he replied, in a low voice, and with a manner there was no mistaking.

Nothing more was said then; yet they both felt, while eye met eye, that their first words of love had been spoken.

More might, perhaps, have passed, as the subject could easily have been enlarged on; but just then they were abruptly

joined by Allan, who came up at a trot and reined in his horse sharply by their side, with a dark expression on his face, which Eveline thought augured ill for his success with Olive, whom he had suddenly left in the care of Mr. Hawke Holcroft.

After quitting the ruins, as Allan rode on by his cousin's side, his memory had gone back to the days when she was a girl of some twelve years or so—a bright-eyed hoyden who could fish, even take a shot from his gun, climb trees, eat apples right off the branch, play marbles with him, grasp a trout darting in the burn under the long yellow broom or purple brambles, and was his companion in many a ramble and out-door frolic; and now inspired by that memory, the scenery, and beauty of the evening, he felt himself disposed to treat with considerable tenderness the lovely girl he hoped to make yet his own.

On the other hand, Olive cared little to please him, and for a time she almost repelled, and yet by doing so she greatly lured and attracted him.

The friendship of Allan and Olive was a source of some perplexity, if not amusement, to Eveline Graham, but of irritation to her mother, to whom they never seemed to act as lovers at all, unless in 'the Scots fashion' of pouting and quarrelling.

To the eyes of all interested in the matter, it did not seem that she cared for him in the least. She never altered a plan or hastened her pace to meet him, or go where he might chance to be—in the library, on the terrace smoking, or in any of the quaint corridors that traversed the old house. She never adopted a dress, a ribbon, or ornament to please his eye, though she sometimes did, coquettishly, he thought, to flatter Hawke Holcroft; and even now, as they were slowly traversing the dark, woody dell of the legend—the *Coire-nan-Uriskin*—she was humming, half in warning, half in waggery, Tennyson's song:

'She can both false and friendly be,
Beware! beware!
Trust her not, she is fooling thee!'

And yet, as she glanced at her soldierly cousin from time to time under her long, dark lashes, she thought that, though he looked stately in the kilt, he seldom looked better than now when in riding costume, with the smartest of light grey cover coats.

The girl's mind vibrated curiously between her over-sensitive pride, her wishes, her doubts, and half-convictions.

If pique at her position in the family with Allan had made her accept, with a certain degree of equanimity, the attentions of Holcroft, she now began to feel a pleasure that she had not more fully encouraged them.

At such moments as the present Allan felt that this fair girl, who had ever been his friend—cherished as a sister—this sweet cousin with the violet eyes and rich brown hair—was dear to him with a tenderness to which he could scarcely give a name, unless it were purest love; and she might have read it in his eyes, intense and strong, but for that spirit of wilfulness which led her to temporize—was it to tyrannize?—or play with it and him.

But may a girl really love a man till she is certain of being loved in return? For Allan, baffled by her manner, had said nothing very pointed as yet, as if he based all their future on her father's will; and times there were when in pique he dropped his way of treating her half playfully, half deferentially, and became absolutely cold.

In fact, the thoughts of Olive, apart from her jealous pride, were somewhat difficult to analyze; but, as yet, she deemed that she could only regard him with a kind of sisterly attention; while he, when not irritated by the presence of Holcroft, would say to Eveline: 'When we are alone, and can slip back into our old memories, I shall soon teach her to love me.'

'But meantime,' replied his sister, 'you are the most tiresome couple in the world.'

'I wish Mr. Holcroft or some one else would join us,' said Olive, looking round in her saddle,

‘Why, it is always Mr. Holcroft!’ exclaimed Allan.

‘You are so provokingly silent. For more than a mile you have not once spoken to me. It is stupid to be so *triste*! Surely there is some one else whose society you prefer, or with whom you would be more lively?’

‘Olive!’ said he, on hearing this blunt and pointed remark—both curiously so for her. ‘You are surely not jealous of anyone?’ he added.

‘Jealous!’ echoed the girl, with a strange but affected kind of lazy scorn; ‘why should I be so, and of *whom*?’

‘Well may you ask, of whom could you be so?’ replied Allan pointedly—so much so that she coloured; ‘though I, of course, matter little to you.’

‘Allan, you are very wrong to say so,’ said the girl softly.

‘Then I am not quite indifferent to you?’ urged Allan impulsively now; ‘you do care for me a little?’

‘Certainly—a good deal, if it is any satisfaction to you; but there—don’t touch my bridle hand, or you will make my horse shy. How can you be so tiresome!’

Allan sighed, and yet he regarded her, in her loveliness and *insouciance*, with an expression just then of mingled amusement, annoyance, and regard in his dark hazel eyes.

With all the love that had been growing in his heart for Olive, he had been in no hurry to urge his suit, for, though impetuous by nature, he could be reserved and cautious enough at times; but now his heart flew to his head, and he said bluntly, ‘Dearest Olive, will you promise to love me—to marry me?’

‘Why require any promise about the matter?’ she replied, as all her wilfulness returned; ‘has not my father promised for me—bequeathed me to you like a bale of goods, or condemned me to poverty?’ she added, with a bitter laugh on her lips that curled with anger. ‘I wonder that he did not order that I was to be locked up and fed on bread and water till I gave my

consent to marry you, or that I was to be dropped into that oubliette which exists somewhere in Dundargue !

‘Cousin Olive,’ said he reproachfully, ‘why this pride and doubt of my purpose? You are as cruel as you are beautiful.’

‘This is worse than anything you have ever said to me,’ she cried, with angry laughter still.

‘Worse?’

‘Yes, an attempt at gross straightforward compliment, as if I was a girl at a railway buffet.’

‘Don’t you like to be complimented?’

‘By some people—yes,’ was the petulant reply.

‘All the girls I have ever known have liked pretty, flattering speeches.’

‘But I am different, I hope, from most of the girls you have known.’

‘By Jove you are!’ replied the Master, twisting his moustache till he made himself wince; ‘but will I never be more to you than I am now?’

‘Never more than my cousin—what would you desire to be? But here comes Mr. Holcroft, to whom I certainly made no sign,’ she added, with some annoyance, as she thought of what had so lately passed between them; and then, so variable was her emotion, that she laughed as she thought: ‘Two proposals in one day, and both made in the saddle too—how droll!’

Allan misinterpreted her silent laugh as a welcome to Holcroft, and shrank from his own angry fears—they were not convictions yet—lest he should adopt that meanest passion of the whole category—jealousy without a just cause—jealousy of one inferior to him in social position and certainly in personal attractions.

When reduced to act cavalier to Miss Ruby Logan, who certainly did not want him, Hawke Holcroft had looked darkly after the cousins as they rode off together, and thought that nothing short of death would prevent him from accomplishing the object he had now in view ere he left Dundargue.

From something in the manner of the cousins, he—a close observer—augured that Allan had not made his ‘innings’ with the heiress, yet he cantered up to Allan’s side, and said smilingly to Olive, ‘May I smoke, Miss Raymond? The road is quite lonely, and if not disagreeable to you——’

‘Certainly,’ said she curtly.

‘And I shall join you,’ added Allan. ‘Can you oblige me with a light, Holcroft?’

Cigars were selected, and Holcroft handed his silver match-box to Allan, who, with a leap of his heart, though without changing colour or a muscle of his dark and sunburned face, saw on his rival’s wrist his own gift sent from Delhi, the gold bangle, which Olive had, perhaps, for the time forgotten, and on which was her own name in raised Roman letters.

He had seen Holcroft in rather close proximity to her during the most of the day, and if piqued thereat, more than ever was he piqued and startled now, and, abruptly wheeling round his horse, he muttered some excuse and joined his sister and his friend Cameron, while the words of the song came ominously back to memory :

‘Trust her not, she is fooling *thee*.’

The bangle ! He blushed to think of it, and shrank as yet from speaking of it, even to Eveline, for he was altogether unaware of under what circumstances Holcroft came to possess it, or the effort Olive had made to procure its return without success, but imagination and jealousy now did much to fill his heart with secret fury.

Would the future hold love or hatred for these two cousins ? It seemed just then difficult to say.

Like Eveline, he thought the gift of the photo a trifle when compared with this, yet the photo was eventually to prove the most serious and troublesome gift of the two.

Wounded self-esteem, disquiet, and intense mortification reigned supreme in the mind of the somewhat proud young

Master of Aberfeldie ; but he felt himself necessitated to dissemble. Hawke Holcroft was his father's guest, the son of his father's oldest and most valued friend ; and while at Dundargue it would be necessary to treat him with courtesy, though Allan never doubted that he was a 'leg,' and resolved that his courtesy would be blended with watchfulness, if—bitter thought—Olive was now worth watching over !

Unprepared for such a crisis or catastrophe as the discovery of the bangle, and ignorant that Allan had made it, when a carpet dance took place that evening at Dundargue, though Olive was arrayed in one of her most becoming toilettes for him, and him alone, he never even addressed her or looked near her ; and, black though his brow, he entirely occupied himself with Ruby Logan ; and, provoked by this, Olive again endured the attention of Holcroft, and thought to play—or affect to play—with them *both*.

In this, however, the little scheme was doomed to be disappointed by the events of the following day.

'I shall quit Dundargue for London, or give up my leave and go back to the regiment, and never look upon her fair, false face again till I have schooled myself into merely regarding her with a brotherly—well, say cousinly—eye !' thought Allan, with great bitterness of spirit.

But how about that absurd will and the settlement of the money ?

CHAPTER XI.—EVELINE'S SUITOR.

'VERILY,' says a writer, 'we miss our opportunities, and live our lives as if they were all to come twice over ; not as if each passing sunset brought us nearer that day when the pulse must cease to beat, and the heart with all its emotions must be stilled for ever.'

Olive was now experiencing the truth of this to a certain extent.

She *had* been—in spite of herself—touched by Allan's earnestness, and on retiring to her room her first act was to have his neglected gift—the little silver idol—the bequest of the grateful subadar—duly installed on a pretty Swiss bracket, and next morning she determined to discover why his manner, after their return from Dunsinane, had been so marked and disagreeable to her, even if she should take the initiative, and have to recur to the conversation which ended so abruptly on the preceding evening.

She entered the breakfast-room full of the subject, and dressed—so far as lace and blue ribbons went—in a most attractive and coquettish morning costume; but Allan was not there—he was at the stables, no doubt, or at the kennel. How tiresome men were, she thought.

'Good morning, Olive darling! how charming you look—I must positively give you a kiss!' exclaimed the not usually effusive Lady Aberfeldie, touching the girl's cheek with her lips.

The last to appear at the breakfast-table was her husband, who entered with a note in his hand, and an expression of surprise on his face.

'Here is a strange thing, Eveline,' said he to Lady Aberfeldie. 'Tappleton has just brought me this note from Allan——'

'From Allan!' exclaimed one or two voices.

'Stating that he would leave by dawn this morning to take the train for the south, and might be absent some time; and this without further explanation.'

'How odd—how unlike him!' exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie. 'Do you know of any business engagement or invitation he had?'

'No—I know of nothing.'

'Or you, Olive—or you, Mr. Cameron?'

All professed ignorance, and the matter was canvassed by the family circle in vain.

'It will be explained, of course. Allan never acts without reason,' said his father, addressing himself to the morning meal.

'Allan gone—how odd—how unaccountable!' was the thought of Olive, whose heart rather reproached her; and now, for a little time, she missed the handsome cousin whom she had so teased, worried, and mortified: and she began to dread that he had resigned his leave of absence, and gone abruptly to rejoin his regiment.

'Olive,' said Lady Aberfeldie, 'do go on with your breakfast.'

'Oh, auntie, I have finished.'

'Finished!—child, you have taken nothing: Tappleton will get you a little grouse-pie.'

'Oh, no—thanks,' replied Olive, and, rising from the table, she quitted the room. The eyes of her aunt and Holcroft followed her, as each had thoughts of their own.

The love the latter professed for her was destitute of jealousy, but was not without fear; and his face just then would have been a picture had anyone cared to study it.

There might have been read satisfaction that by Allan's unexpected departure he had the field all to himself; annoyance, for the Dundargue despatch-box often brought him, and on this morning had done so, epistles in blue envelopes, which he cared not to receive; greed, as he thought of the prize that might yet be his; and hot impatience to find it in his grasp; and thus, while affecting to listen to Lord Aberfeldie, who was describing to him and Sir Paget a cover they were to shoot over that day, his mind was revolving how he might succeed in entrapping Olive Raymond into some kind of Scotch marriage (whatever that was) in fun or jest, and then declare it was a true and solemn ceremony. He thought he had heard of such things being tried and done, but was not quite certain.

However, he took fresh courage now that he would have her all to himself, and thought, with Bulwer, that 'thrones and

bread man wins by the aid of others. Fame and woman's heart he can only gain through himself.'

Not that he cared much for fame or woman's heart either ; but he could mightily appreciate her fortune.

Whatever was the secret thought of Olive about the sudden and unexpected departure of Allan, she felt some renewal of her pique, but of a different kind, when told by Eveline of the magnificent suite of Maltese ornaments he had brought home.

'For whom?' she asked.

'You, of course.'

'Then he has never offered them for my acceptance.'

'Think of your manner to him, Olive.'

'They are for Ruby Logan more likely. He has met Ruby *before*, we all know.'

'I should not be surprised if they become a gift to Ruby now,' replied Eveline, who was quietly provoked by Olive's treatment of her brother ; 'though, when he got these jewels at Malta, I question if he knew of that yellow-haired damsel's existence.'

And now, greatly to the vexation of Eveline, and the amusement perhaps of Olive, the latter's bangle remained on the wrist of the enterprising Mr. Holcroft, though none of them knew the mischief that the discovery of it had wrought in the mind of Allan Graham ; but in the latter's absence poor little Eveline was doomed to have—unsupported by his presence and advice—some heavy trouble of her own.

Lord and Lady Aberfeldie were in consultation in the latter's boudoir, a little, old-fashioned room of octagonal shape, the panelled walls of which were hung with rich silk—a sanctum long sacred to the chatelaines of Dundargue, and the whole appurtenances of which had that combined air of ease, repose, and grandeur peculiar to the furniture of an ancient and long-descended race.

Kelpie—a currish-looking terrier, but her ladyship's pet—had

got his morning repast of cream and macaroons from her own white hands, and, this important duty over, she and her husband began to converse on family matters.

Lady Aberfeldie, amid these, indulged in some angry surmises as to how long they were 'to have the society of Mr. Holcroft.'

'I cannot say that I care much personally for Hawke Holcroft,' replied her husband; 'but his father, as you know, saved my life at Alma, and won therefor the V.C. I have told you, Eveline, I think, that when Colin Campbell's Highland brigade advanced in échelon of regiments along the Kourgané Hill, the Black Watch, of course, led the way, and, just about the time the Russian Kasan column broke, no particular sound had followed our firing, but the yells of their wounded ringing through the smoke. With the next volley we heard a rattling sound, as our bullets fell like hail upon the tin-kettles they carried outside their knapsacks, as all the great grey-coated blocks of infantry were *right about face* now, in full retreat. It was just then, as our cavalry and guns swept after them in pursuit, that I fell wounded, and would have been bayoneted on the spot by four Russians, who lay among some caper bushes shamming death, had not old Major Holcroft cut them down like ninepins, and protected me till some of our fellows returned. I cannot forget all that, you know.'

Lady Aberfeldie, who had heard all this fifty times at least before, sighed with impatience, and said, 'His son certainly appears to have some attraction for Olive; and what would you think if Allan, repelled by her, was actually to fall in love with Ruby Logan and her amber locks? What a complication that might be.'

'Don't suggest such a thing for a moment. I hope he will prove himself every way worthy of one who has so long occupied, like Eveline, the place of a daughter in our hearts.'

'Talking of Eveline, it is high time she was informed of Sir

Paget's views and wishes ; and while on the subject may I ask,' she added, with some asperity of tone, 'how long Mr. Cameron is to be here?'

'A week yet, and then he must report himself at headquarters.'

'A whole week?' muttered Lady Aberfeldie, who was far from inhospitable when she approved of the objects to whom she thought hospitality should be extended.

'I do like Stratherroch. He is like his father, old Angus of the Cameron Highlanders, yet not so lively ; for Angus was the king of good fellows, and used to keep the mess-table in a roar.'

'Yet I would his son were with the regiment again, or anywhere else but here.'

'I think he admires Eveline.'

'I am certain of it, and the sooner their intimacy terminates the better. Eveline and Strath—good Heavens !' exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie, with her white jewelled hands uplifted, 'never again must their names be mingled, even in our family circle, especially under pending circumstances.'

'They do seem intimate,' said the peer moodily ; 'but have not at least progressed so far as the use of Christian names.'

'That would be intolerable ;' and, ringing the bell, Lady Aberfeldie desired a servant to summon her daughter, who appeared in a very coquettish and becoming lawn-tennis costume, for a game on the lawn, where the courts were already set and some friends awaited.

She entered with a bright smile, which soon died away, for she read an expression in the faces of her parents, especially that of her mother, which seemed to her sensitive heart prophetic of evil.

If it be true, as Madame de Staël asserts, that 'love occupies the whole life of a woman,' it need not be a matter of surprise that the sex can discover each other's love-secrets with ease ; thus, though Lady Aberfeldie fully suspected what filled the

heart of her daughter—so closely had she watched her—she was somewhat pitiless now.

With all her queenly manner and soft grace, her unexceptional toilettes and sauvity of manner, Lady Aberfeldie had a will of iron, yea, of adamant in some things, and her daughter's marriage with Sir Paget was one of them.

She was told plainly and bluntly that he had proposed for her hand ; had asked permission to address her on the subject ; had offered magnificent—yea, princely settlements ; and it was expected the marriage would take place when the family returned to London, next season.

The long-dreaded cloud had burst upon her at last !

She grew white as a lily on hearing this sentence, clung to a console table for support, and then burst into a torrent of tears, while her father drew her tenderly towards him.

‘Be calm, child,’ said he ; ‘we shall give you plenty of time to think about it ! marriage is a serious thing at all times.’

Eveline thought it was doubly serious with such a bridegroom, but could only sob, while her mother eyed her gloomily, as she thought this excessive grief and repugnance augured worse for her scheme than indignation or defiance would have done ; but poor Eveline was all softness and gentleness.

‘What folly is this ?’ she asked.

‘I am your only daughter, mamma,’ urged Eveline.

‘Hence it is your first duty to your family, to yourself, and the world to make an early, eligible, and wealthy marriage. Every season brings many such to pass in our own circle.’

‘Are we so poor, mamma ?’

‘We are not rich, and know not what may happen.’

‘Did Lady Aberfeldie speak prophetically ? If so, it was an utterance made unawares.’

‘Eveline darling,’ said her father, ‘you were content enough with the attentions of Sir Paget, and to accept even his presents in London, a season or two ago.’

'I was but a girl then fresh from school, and—and joined other girls in laughing at my having an old lover. I—I knew no better,' she continued, sobbing.

'And had not met Cameron of Stratherroch!' said her mother through her set teeth, and quite forgetting the *rôle* she had so recently suggested.

'No,' thought Eveline, 'and had not learned to love him. She shivered as if she had been struck when her mother spoke, and then said, with all the firmness she could assume :

'You must mistake us in some way, mamma. Mr. Cameron has never addressed a word to me that he might not have addressed to yourself.'

'I am glad of it—then I shall taunt you with his name no more,' said her mother, kissing her forehead. 'People generally, but young ladies especially, should never indulge in strong emotions.'

'Perhaps, mamma ; but why ?'

'They age the face so much by lining it.'

Eveline covered with her handkerchief her whole sweet face, which was quivering with emotion now. She felt that the romance of her young girl's life was quite passing from her, and that, even if she escaped a marriage with Sir Paget, she must think of Evan Cameron and his silent love no more !

'Think of Sir Paget's princely settlements,' said Lord Aberfeldie. 'But how difficult it is,' he added, as if to himself, 'to imbue a woman—a pretty girl more than all—with any idea of the seriousness of pounds, shillings, and pence ! To her they are as the sands upon the seashore, unless she has known want.'

'Do reflect on all this, Eveline,' urged her mother.

'I cannot ; and why should I do so ?'

'Because most of the great evils of life might be avoided if we would only take time to reflect.'

'In a matter like this, mamma,' said Eveline, taking courage

from her desperation, and hoping by temporizing to gain, at least, time, 'reflection might lead to madness. Can wealth or princely settlements make up for that disparity of years which will excite ridicule in all the girls who know me, and cover me with contempt as a mean, sordid, and covetous creature in marrying a man I do not and can never love, and who cannot really care for me, whatever he may think or say? So, so I am to be taken to market, as it were, and sold to the best advantage. That is the plain English of it !'

'Eveline, how can you adopt a tone so little like you?' said her mother reproachfully. 'Sir Paget will be sure to address you on this subject, as he has your papa's permission, and, when he does so, be sure that you comport yourself as becomes *my* daughter,' she added rather haughtily, and rather ignoring her husband in the matter. 'But go ; I hear Olive and Miss Logan calling for you.'

Eveline hurried away, bathed her eyes, and then, hat in hand, descended from the terrace to the sunny lawn, where Olive, Ruby, and other girls were flitting about, radiant with smiles and in gaily-coloured costumes, with saucy and bewitching hats, talking and laughing merrily ; but the girl felt as one in a dream, a nightmare. A dark cloud seemed to envelop her, amid which she heard the voices of her friends, and it may be imagined with what emotions in her breast she saw, in the tennis-court opposite her, Cameron, looking so handsome in a kind of athlete's flannel dress, and the rotund figure of Sir Paget in a tight morning coat, out of the neck of which his round, shining head was jerked ever and anon in the turtle fashion we have described.

Never while she lived, Eveline thought, should she forget the horror she had of that game of lawn-tennis ; the part she had to act in it under a glorious sunshine, and the desire she had for the seclusion of her own room, for by contrast with the chaos in her own heart the whole bright scene became a species of grim phantasmagoria.

Her heart seemed full of tears ; her naturally buoyant and happy spirit was crushed. She dared hardly trust herself to address even Cameron, who saw, with a lover's instinct, that something, he knew not what (unless with reference to Sir Paget), had gone decidedly wrong.

We have already adverted to the strong passion an elderly swain like Sir Paget may conceive for a young girl ; and, encouraged by her parents' permission, he was now giving full swing to it, as he watched her slender, lithe, and willowy figure in the various postures incident to the game, which tested *his* powers of action severely, and during a pause in it he approached her with a smile rippling on his rubicund old face, and displaying a set of teeth that were first-rate as to cost and quality.

'My dear Miss Graham,' he said, with a most insinuating jerk of his head, 'why do you avoid me ?'

'I am not aware that I avoid you ; I hope I don't do so,' replied Eveline, colouring with annoyance, and at the conviction that she certainly had done so. Then, as a kind of hunted feeling came over her, she added : 'But I do not think, Sir Paget, that I am bound to account to you for all I do.'

'Of course not,' said he, with a bow, and Eveline coloured more deeply at the ungraciousness of her own speech ; 'of course not, my dear young lady—as yet,' he added, under his breath.

At last she pleaded illness, fatigue, and headache, threw down her hat, and fairly fled to her own room.

CHAPTER XII.—A REVELATION TO HOLCROFT.

THE sudden, unexpected, and unexplained departure of Allan Graham from Dundargue (a reason for which will be given in due time), if it puzzled his family, still more puzzled and piqued Olive, especially after what passed between them on their home-

ward ride. But then, says Lefanu, — ‘Women are so enigmatical ; some in everything—all in matters of the heart.’

The monetary matters of Mr. Hawke Holcroft were approaching a species of crisis now, and he was daily getting orange-coloured missives and messages ‘wired’ in mysterious terms from jockeys, bookmakers, and other horsey folks that added to his tribulation, for things seemed to be going wrong with him, and he felt that now or never must he attempt to secure the heiress, who, he thought, was only waiting to be carried off.

Even loo and écarté in the evening with such pigeon-like players as Sir Paget were beginning to fail as resources.

‘Odd fellow in his way,’ remarked the baronet to Cameron. ‘A trifle too lucky at cards for my taste.’

‘Or mine,’ said Cameron grimly.

‘Turns up the king too often after the early hours of the morning.’

Yet when night came again and the small hours of the morning, the somewhat simple M.P. for Slough-cum-Sloggit was again a heavy loser to Holcroft.

‘He has some secret about him,’ said the former.

‘Most men have some secret which they generally keep to themselves,’ replied Cameron.

‘Secrets certainly, which they seldom tell to their wives or sweethearts,’ said the baronet, laughing.

We have said that Olive had a secret thought that might prove somewhat fatal to Allan’s success with her, a mistaken idea that Holcroft loved her—loved her for herself—and despite the tenor of her father’s will, while Allan might love her because he knew the value of its tenor to himself.

And, now that the latter was so unaccountably absent, Holcroft was full of confidence, and, the ice having once been broken, thought it would be easy to go back where he had left off on the ride home from Dunsinane.

In his own selfish way he loved her ; but then she was

beautiful. Loved her! 'Oh, poverty of language, that we must so often use the word love!' exclaims a writer.

It was some days before his inevitable departure from Dundargue (and not an hour too soon for that), when he and Olive were somewhat earlier, and before anyone else, in the breakfast-room, and the notes Ronald Gair's pipes, playing his morning reveille, 'The Black Watch,' a slow and wailing air, were dying away on the terrace outside.

Holcroft's face looked worn and haggard—more freckled, and the eyes more than usually shifty in their expression. He had received some letters and telegrams the evening before that upset him so much that he failed even to win at loo or écarté, and the livelong night he had been heard by Cameron pacing to and fro, as if unable to rest.

Olive was struck by his pallid appearance.

They exchanged 'Good-mornings,' and then a few minutes' silence ensued.

'We may have rain soon,' was the not very original remark of Holcroft.

'The sky looks very like it. Rain always comes when the mist is where we see it now, on yonder low spur of the Sidlaw Hills,' replied Olive.

She was kneeling on a bearskin, beside the great staghounds, Shiuloch and Bran, with her little white hands outspread before the fire for warmth; and a charming picture she made, in her morning costume, fresh and lovely as a fairy, with the dogs in the foreground, and the great carved stone arch of the baronial chimney-piece for a frame.

Hawke Holcroft turned from the window and came to her side, though curiously enough the hazel eyes of the hounds glistened, and they showed their teeth at him, suggestive of kicks secretly administered.

'We are down earlier than usual this morning,' said she.

'All the better,'

‘Why?’

‘I want so particularly to talk to you,’ said he, with all the softness he could assume.

‘And I with you,’ said Olive, with a frankness that was a curious mistake. ‘You leave us soon, I believe?’

‘Yes.’

‘For London?’

‘For London,’ he replied mechanically, as it were.

‘I thought you came to stay out the grouse-shooting?’

‘Till the tenth of December! I have not been asked,’ he replied, gnawing his yellow moustache; and then, after a pause, added, ‘Would *you* wish that I stayed?’

‘Certainly, if you are enjoying yourself,’ was the girl’s frank but—after what he had urged some time ago—rather rash response.

His eyes sparkled—he drew nearer.

‘Miss Raymond—Olive!’ he exclaimed, but paused as, at that moment, Lady Aberfeldie swept into the room; ‘on the terrace—the terrace after breakfast,’ he whispered, hurriedly, and then turned to receive his hostess’s morning greeting, which was so frigid that he feared she had overheard him call her niece by her Christian name.

Holcroft was rather abstracted at breakfast; thus Ruby Logan, who had been watching him, said: I would not, if I were you, put more sugar on the devilled turkey; it won’t improve it.’

‘Forgot it was not salt; thanks, Miss Logan,’ stammered Holcroft.

Now, whether the charming Olive was inspired by coquetry, curiosity, caprice, or a strange desire to play with fire, we know not; but when breakfast was over she laid down a novel she had been reading, or affecting to read, at intervals during the meal, and, assuming her garden hat, with all the laces and ribbons of her bright morning dress fluttering about her, while

everyone else at table was deep in his or her letters and papers, went forth upon—the terrace !

Now Mr. Hawke Holcroft never read novels or anything else unless for a purpose. He glanced at the page which Olive had left open (the work was 'Miss Forrester'), and the passage struck him as most *apropos* to himself :

'I never pretended to goodness. I have certain views for myself. I never pretended to fooling. I am clever. What stands between me and my ambition I will remove ; of whatever can administer to it I will avail myself. Beyond this, it seems to me, I am as good as other people.'

'Hawke, my boy, yourself to a hair!' thought he, as he quietly sought the terrace, not by the French window, as Olive had done, but by going through a corridor and the entrance hall.'

As coolly as if she had no prevision of what he was sure to urge, Olive, who wore a waggish yet shy expression under her garden hat, and who kept her hands deep in the pockets of her morning dress, said : 'What have you to say to me here that you could not have said in the vicinity of the tea-urn ?'

'All that I have to say may be said in three words.'

'Three ! say it then.'

'I love you ; a confession that has hovered on my timid lips many a time.'

'I cannot listen to this, and I wish to have back my bangle. If Allan were to see it—good Heavens !'

'I have said that it shall be buried with me. Do give me some hope.'

'Of what ; permission to retain the bangle ?'

'No ; that you may one day love me.'

'I cannot.'

'Say rather that you will not.'

Barring, in an angle of the terrace, her attempts to leave him, he continued, in an earnestness that was born of monetary pressure and desperate hope, to plead his passion.

‘I am greatly honoured,’ replied the girl, growing cold as he waxed warm, and glancing nervously at the windows of the mansion ; but I am very sorry——’

‘That you don’t love me.’

‘Yes.’

‘But you may in time. Oh, how I could teach you to do so ! Let me wait and strive, Olive. You deem me wild, perhaps—horsey, and all that sort of thing ; but do you think a man never changes, never grows better, under a woman’s softening influence ? Are you entirely to let this family compact, whatever it may be, Olive—pardon me, Miss Raymond,’ he added, as he saw how her face clouded by the reference to her position—‘are you intending to let it stand between you and all other chances of marriage ?’

‘You have no right to question me thus, or to assume this interest in my affairs, Mr. Holcroft.’

‘Pardon me, but I have a love for you that will last while life does.’

He did not add that it was the love of—her money.

‘If there is only the Master, your cousin, between us, that is no barrier, as I know you don’t love him.’

‘Then you know more of me than I do of myself,’ said Olive, provoked by his blunt brusquerie of manner, and failing to be flattered by his pertinacity just then.

‘Perhaps you deem me an heiress ?’ said Olive, as a new light suddenly broke upon her.’

‘My dear Miss Raymond,’ stammered Holcroft, colouring with surprise at the abruptness of her question, ‘I never thought upon the subject ; I only knew that—that—I am not just now a man of fortune ; my place in Essex——’ he paused, thinking the less he said about *it* the better. ‘But who thinks of self when the heart is full of passion !’ he added magnanimously. ‘But tell me now,’ said he, in his most suave tone, ‘do you care for anyone else more than for me ?’

‘I don’t care for you at all—at least in the way you mean,’ she replied defiantly.

He ground his teeth, even while he smiled, and thought :

‘I must have patience before I tempt my fate again !’

Hawke Holcroft had made it so much a habit during his sojourn at Dundargue to be in close attendance upon Olive—especially when they were alone together—that his lovemaking took her less by surprise. In a spirit of pique she had permitted him to dangle, and to play—if we may use the term—at admiration for herself ; but, now that he had become serious a second time, she became alarmed.

The remark which had escaped her had excited some surprise in the mind of Holcroft, as it interested him deeply ; thus he said, in a low soft voice : ‘You referred to your not being an heiress, Miss Raymond, as if *that* could possibly make any difference with one who loves you as—as——’

‘There, there, that will do !’ interrupted the impetuous Olive ; ‘I am *not* an heiress, in one sense, but very much of a beggar, if you knew all,’ she added, in a voice that faltered.

He regarded her with some bewilderment, as well he might, and said : ‘My dear Miss Raymond, what am I to understand by this paradox?’

‘Understand that I must marry my cousin Allan, or forfeit papa’s fortune—it goes to him if I refuse, or to charities.’

Her distinctness and vehemence carried conviction with her words. Holcroft was confounded ; but, being a practised dissembler, he only smiled, and said : ‘A most remarkable arrangement, and a tyrannical one for you. But suppose the Master had died in his boyhood—or were to die now?’

‘The will would be worthless in effect, of course, I suppose,’ replied Olive, whose cheeks now burned scarlet, for—always a creature of hot impulse—she now thought, ‘*why* should I have permitted myself to speak to *him*, one almost a stranger, or to any man, of papa’s will? What must he think of me ! Oh, what will Aunt Aberfeldie say?’

For half a minute Holcroft was silent. He was thinking, 'This must be all bosh!—a cock and a bull, or a madman's will; she doesn't know what she is talking about—no woman or girl ever knows business. Well, I've a pull on her anyway; a viscount's niece isn't in a fellow's power every day, as she will find herself in mine.'

What he referred to we shall show ere long.

While Olive was still crimson with reflections on her own imprudence, Holcroft took possession of her passive hands, and said, in a partly assumed voice of agitation: 'You told me, Miss Raymond—let me say Olive—a minute or two ago that you did not care for me. I shall not take that as your final answer; and ere I leave Dundargue, when I again venture to speak to you on the subject nearest my heart, your reply——'

'Will too probably be the same,' replied Olive, wrenching away her hands, as steps were heard near, and she hastily re-entered the house.

The footsteps heard were those of Allan, who came leisurely up the flight, a broad and stately one, which led to the terrace. He had, while proceeding down the avenue, observed the pair together, and, as it seemed to him, in rather too close proximity. He also remarked Olive's abrupt departure, at *his* approach as he supposed, and his soul became ireful within him; but he felt himself, as he gave a hand to Holcroft, compelled to dissemble.

So did the latter, who met him smilingly.

'Welcome home to Dundargue,' he exclaimed; 'you have come back as unexpectedly as you went; but whither?'

'Only as far as Edinburgh.'

'Ah.' The reply seemed rather to relieve Holcroft. Nothing was known about him there, he thought.

'A lady was on the terrace with you just now?'

'Yes—Miss Raymond.'

'So I thought—sorry she did not stay.'

‘Why—particularly?’

‘I have some news that may interest her.’

‘About whom?’

‘Herself.’

‘Hope they are pleasant?’

‘That will depend upon how she may view them,’ said Allan, with a nod, as he entered the house.

‘Now, what the deuce has he been up to—this fellow, with his hair cut to the military pattern—Newgate crop, I should call it—he looks queer this morning,’ muttered Holcroft, as he selected a cigar from his case, bit the end off with his sharp white teeth, and proceeded to smoke it with brief, angry, and unenjoyable puffs that indicated a mind full of bitterness and ill at ease. Olive’s communication had been a sudden revelation to him.

CHAPTER XIII.—ALLAN PROVES MYSTERIOUS.

IF Allan’s sudden departure and unexplained absence excited some curiosity in the minds of his family, his return excited it afresh when he declined to make any explanation until he had held an interview with his cousin, Olive Raymond, who, for a time, secluded herself in her own room on the usual feminine plea of having a headache.

Eveline, who had so longed for his return, now with tears told him of her father’s frequently expressed wish—nay, command, and Sir Paget’s forthcoming proposal; but, full of his own miseries, he could only caress her and say: ‘God bless you, little one. I wish you well over all this.’

Sir Paget had left Dundargue pending the final arrangements, as he thought; thus the cloud and the dread were hanging over her still.

‘Has Olive received back her gold bangle—my gift—from Mr. Holcroft?’ asked Allan, with knitted brows.

‘I—I think not. How did you learn he had it?’

‘Plainly enough—I saw it on his wrist!’

‘Where he put it, in play—not she.’

‘I should hope not, by Jove!’

‘I know she has asked him for it repeatedly.’

‘Can’t make the beggar out.’

‘I can—he thinks Olive an heiress.

Allan’s dark brow became more deeply knitted.

‘She thinks that if she married you, Allan dear,’ said his sister, after a pause, ‘she would be sacrificing her own pride and liberty, and that you might marry her though not caring for her——’

‘But for that wretched money?’ said Allan, with a kind of snort. ‘Poor Olive—she views the situation in this light! I certainly shall not ask her to make any sacrifices for *me*, and, so far as I am concerned, she shall be free as a bird in the air.’

His sister regarded him now with some perplexity, not understanding what he meant, but said: ‘You have just come in time for a little carpet dance we have arranged as a farewell treat to Ruby Logan, Mr. Holcroft, and—and Evan Cameron, who are about to leave Dundargue.’

Allan noted the inflection of her voice as she uttered the name of his young brother-officer, and then hurried away, as their mother entered the room, and with rather a cloudy expression in her face, though he hastened to kiss her.

‘You have been to Edinburgh, I have heard,’ she said.

‘Yes.’

‘About what, Allan?’

‘That you will learn in time, mother. I must speak with Olive first.’

Lady Aberfeldie was full of irrepressible curiosity, but Allan declined to gratify it just then.

‘Have your recent movements any reference to Olive?’

‘You will learn in time, mother.’

Lady Aberfeldie’s face shaded with annoyance, for, only the day before, she and the petulant young lady in question had indulged in a tiff between them.

Perceiving a wistful look and fitful manner about Olive, and that she was more than usually restless and irritable, Lady Aberfeldie had unwisely spoken to her on the subject of Allan’s regard for her.

Olive had sat for a moment or two, with her delicate hands tightly interlaced in her lap, and then, turning defiantly to her aunt, she said : ‘I will never marry Allan!’

‘You must marry Allan, my dear girl,’ replied Lady Aberfeldie calmly and firmly.

‘Why?’

‘You know your father’s wish.’

‘Oh, the will, of course! So I am to be treated like a child? Well, if so, I may prove a wilful and dangerous one!’

Her aunt’s report of this conversation made Lord Aberfeldie more than ever anxious for the return of his son.

‘You are very mysterious, Allan. You and Olive seem a pair of enigmas,’ said Lady Aberfeldie. ‘But your father waits you in the library, and perhaps you will condescend to confide in him, if not in *me*. I must own it will be a fatal thing for your future happiness if Olive thinks you seek her for gain; but for what does Mr. Holcroft so evidently seek her?’

Allan smiled disdainfully.

‘I have tried to think, mother dear, that she is *not* affected by this person Holcroft, but begin to own to myself that “the faith that worketh miracles” is not in me.’

When questioned by his father, Allan made the same reticent reply, that he must see Olive before making any explanations.

‘The time has come now, Allan,’ said Lord Aberfeldie, ‘when you are bound in honour to make your cousin an offer, for in this peculiar entanglement—for such, I grant you, it is—

you and she do not stand in the position of most engaged persons.'

'But suppose I have no wish to marry——'

'Absurd—outrageous!'

'Or may not marry at all?'

'By the refusal of Olive?'

'Yes.'

'Then her fortune, or most of it, becomes yours, in terms of the will——'

'Which has been a curse to us both. In her mind, and in the eyes of all who may come to hear of it, we must lie under the degrading imputation of a mercenary motive.'

'Not if you act with tact and delicacy, and surely your boy-and-girl attachment must remain unchanged, said Lord Aberfeldie, in a voice that was soft, rather than indignant, as his memory went back to the day when Olive first came a little orphan child to Dundargue—a tiny and graceful creature, with tender, wondering, and beseeching eyes—a child that climbed upon his knee, clung to him with sympathetic love, and played with his watch-chain or the tassels of his sash, if he was in uniform. 'And so,' he added, after a pause, 'you must propose to the dear girl as a mere matter of form.'

'I have already done so,' said Allan, recalling, what he was not likely to forget, all that had occurred during the homeward ride from Dunsinane.

'Well, sir?' asked his father.

'I was laughed at—mocked, I may say.'

'Impossible! The girl must have been jesting with you.'

'I do not think so,' said Allan, both sadly and bitterly, as he thought of the bangle and many other circumstances, the inevitable 'trifles light as air.'

'Well, you are bound to renew your proposal.'

'I do not think so, nor shall I again, unless some change comes over her.'

‘If I exert my authority as guardian and trustee——’

‘She may run away. Olive is a proud and restless girl with a defiant spirit, though she has a very affectionate heart.’

‘But you cannot expect that she is to propose to *you*.’

‘I do love her, father—love her dearly; but fear that she views me too much as a brother to love me otherwise.’

‘This is rank nonsense. Think of your separations, and of your last—one well nigh seven years—with the Black Watch.’

‘But might it not be the case that she may have a *penchant* for some one else.

‘For whom?’ asked Lord Aberfeldie angrily.

‘Well, say for your friend Mr. Holcroft.’

‘Penniless Hawke Holcroft! absurd—the man has seen but little of her.’

‘Quite enough in London and here to learn to admire, if not to love her. I would, however, rather see her laid in her grave than married to Holcroft,’ said Allan, in a stern but broken voice, adding under his breath, as he left his father’s presence and cut short an unpleasant interview, ‘but, so far as I am concerned, she shall be free to choose for herself—free as the wind.’

‘What the deuce can all this mean?’ exclaimed Lord Aberfeldie, in great perplexity; ‘was ever an unfortunate man more troubled with two intractable girls than I am with Eveline and Olive!’

It has been said that, ‘if exceedingly few men and women understand each other when they are in their sober senses, how must it fare when they are under the blinding influence of love?’

But Allan’s course of action was decided now.

CHAPTER XIV.—OLIVE CHANGES HER MIND.

‘You are pleased to see me again, Olive?’

‘Of course, Allan—why do you ask me?’ she exclaimed, putting both her hands into his in welcome.

He retained them with a tender pressure for half a minute, looking the while wistfully into her violet eyes, and then he let them drop from his clasp.

‘You wish particularly to speak with me, I understand?’ said Olive, nervously thinking it must refer to the *tête-à-tête* he had overseen on the terrace.

‘Yes—particularly, dear Olive.’

When he saw her tender beauty, her grace, and her witchery, and felt all the subtle charm of her presence, his heart was wrung by the thought that, by the very act he had the power to do, and the suggestions he was about to make to her, he might place her at the entire disposal of Hawke Holcroft, of whose real character he now knew more than formerly.

How variable had been the emotions she had, ever since his return from India, exhibited towards him! By turns she had been changeable and indifferent apparently; playful, petulant, and imperious; yet always bewitching and sweet.

Seeing the cloudy and sad expression of his eye, Olive said: ‘You have not come to scold me for anything, Allan. We are at least friends.’

‘Would we were more,’ said Allan, remembering what his father had urged but a few minutes before.

‘Surely to be cousins is a near enough relationship.’

‘Olive,’ said he reproachfully, ‘unless you have formed a distinct attachment for some one else, I must say I do not understand you.’

‘I don’t want you to understand me,’ she replied, with half-averted face.

‘Why are you so hard with me?’ he exclaimed, with a wistful, longing, and miserable expression in his eyes.

She made no reply, so he spoke again: ‘I have had a long consultation with our family agent in Edinburgh.’

‘About what?’

‘Your affairs and mine, Olive.’

‘*My* affairs?’

‘Yes, and I have obtained the opinion of Ruby Logan’s father, and of counsel of much higher—yes, of the highest—repute on the vexed subject of your father’s will—vexed at least between you and me, Olive.’

She gazed at him with something of vacant surprise blended with inquiry in her face.

‘What I am about to suggest may be dangerous, as I do not know the terms on which you permit yourself to be with this—Mr. Holcroft—but I have had excellent legal advice, and——’

‘Legal advice—oh, indeed!’ she interrupted, with a toss of her pretty head; ‘that is well, for the laws as made by you men rank us women with children and lunatics. And what says this advice?’

‘That you can be freed from the trammels of your father’s will—free, and the inheritrix of your own great wealth.’

She regarded him for a minute with blank astonishment; then as bright joy like sunshine spread over her sweet face and sparkled in the depth of her eyes, she exclaimed, in a low voice: ‘Free, do you say, free in my own actions, and free to bestow papa’s money how and on whom I please?’

‘On *whom* you please,’ replied Allan, thinking with intense mortification on Holcroft, and Holcroft only; for personally he was far above thinking of the fortune that might otherwise be his own, as the stars are above the earth. ‘Let me but see all this matter fully arranged and then I shall be content,’ said he, after a pause, during which they had been regarding each other:

he, her with sadness, and she him with bewilderment. 'There are rumours in the air of a turn-up with the Turks, and of a war in Egypt, and right glad I am of that !'

'Why, Allan ?'

'Because I'll get attached to the first army corps that sails, even if the Black Watch is not going ; but that it is sure to be, as, thank God ! the dear old corps is always in everything.'

'And why this joy ?'

'To get as far away from you as possible,' he replied bluntly, in a hollow tone.

'Must you do so, Allan ?'

'Yes, unless I mean to drive myself mad.'

'Do you really love me so much—and—and,' she paused, for she seemed touched, her sweet lips were quivering now.

'What more ?'

'For myself alone,' she asked softly.

'Love you—oh, Olive !'

'There now, don't !' she exclaimed, turning away her face, and Allan shrank back.

'Playing with me, after all—after all !' he muttered. 'Will you please to look at the opinion of counsel?' he added, drawing from his pocket a folio document, stitched with a red thread, and with a broad margin.

'What a long story !' she exclaimed, as she glanced at and read :

'Chambers, Edinburgh.

'Copy of Counsel's opinion referred to in letter of 20th October, 1882, on the will of the late Oliver Raymond, Esq., of Jamaica, with note of fees thereon.'

'What a fearful long story !' exclaimed Olive again. 'Tell me all about it, Allan ? but pray don't read it.'

'The will of your father is herein denounced as eccentric—one that no court of law would enforce, nor could uphold, as in

more than one instance it is not conceived in strictly legal terms, and, to all intents and purposes, can be put aside if you choose. Thus, Olive, you are free—free from all the bonds—if such ever existed—that seemed to bind you to me ; and I thank God that it is so, and I shall go to Egypt, perhaps, with a lighter heart. All that now remains to be done is to take the means, if such are necessary, to have the document set aside as so much waste paper, and you duly made mistress of your inheritance, as you are now of age, in England, at least, where it is invested. Thus, you see, Olive, this opinion of counsel is most valuable to you.’

Her soft eyes were brimming over with tears now, as she mechanically took the document in her tremulous fingers.

‘And thus you relinquish me?’ she said.

‘I relinquish, gladly, your fortune, and all control over your actions, if—you choose.’

‘But I don’t choose ! Oh, Allan, how generous all this is of you. But I shall not be less so, nor will I act upon this opinion of counsel.’

‘How?’

‘See, thus !’

And, tearing it into pieces, she cast them into the fire-grate.

‘Illegal as it may be, papa’s will must be *now* a law to me more than ever.’

‘And you, Olive?’

‘Love you, dear Allan, and love you dearly,’ cried the wilful and impulsive girl, as all her heart went forth to him, and he pressed her to his breast at last.

Doubt, pride, defiance, and petulance had all passed away, and Olive was all softness, love, and joy now ; and to the pair time seemed for a term to stand still, and, save their caressing words softly murmured, and the twitter of birds among the ivy without, silence appeared to reign in this room ; and nothing seemed to disturb them, till Olive suddenly started from Allan’s arms.

'What is it, love?' he asked.

'A face at the window?'

'Whose face?'

'I know not,' she replied, with some agitation. 'It has just vanished.'

She thought, nay, she was sure, it had the features of Hawke Holcroft, but she did not *say* so. If it were he, how much had he overheard, how much overseen!

But she soon forgot the episode, and that night at dinner she looked more radiant than ever, in her suite of Maltese jewellery—gold set with orient pearls.

'It is usual for engaged ladies to have a ring,' Allan had whispered, as he slipped a magnificently jewelled hoop upon her mystic finger.

'Fool that I have been!' thought the girl. 'How near was I estranging one of the best and dearest of men in the world, not for the sake of one immeasurably his inferior, even worthless perhaps, but in a spirit of vanity, pique, and suspicion!'

'Allan,' she whispered to him softly, when an opportunity came, 'I see now how foolish I have been and wilful—oh, so wilful! But we all make mistakes in life, and require at times each other's pity and forgiveness.'

How sweetly and shyly she looked and spoke.

Hawke Holcroft felt intuitively, and indeed saw, that there was some sudden change in the bearing of the pair to each other, and that a sudden brightness had come into the faces of all—even that of Eveline, usually now so *triste* and pale—and under his sandy moustache he 'wondered what the devil it all meant,' till his watchful eyes detected the new and brilliant ring on the engaged finger of Olive Raymond!

If Mr. Hawke Holcroft imagined he had nothing to dread personally from the Master's sudden visit to Edinburgh he reckoned without his host, as he would have found had he

overheard a brief conversation which took place between Allan and his comrade, young Cameron, as they loitered in the gun-room looking over old Joe-Mantons, new rifles, and central-fire breechloaders, etc.

He was not slow to perceive very soon that Allan, usually so suave and pleasant in manner, treated him now with a kind of stiffness that was almost hauteur; but he dissembled his rage, and so did Allan, who had a keen sense of the laws of hospitality, with the genuine British dread of aught that might approach a 'scene,' more than all as the visit of Holcroft was nearly ended.

Poor wretch! he strove well to keep a brave front in society, while letters that often lay beside his plate at breakfast were seen to cloud his brow with perplexity, for they alluded to wrong horses backed, I. O. U.'s, bills, and cheques 'referred to drawer,' and so forth, and he must have left Dundargue before this, but for a friendly slip of paper, which he had received from Lord Aberfeldie, that 'Fool of Quality,' as he thought him.

'Look here, Cameron,' said Allan, as the twain smoked their cigars in a quiet place, 'it is little wonder to me that you, Sir Paget Puddicombe, and one or two others, lost at cards with Holcroft as you did. I dined with our fellows at the mess in the Castle when I went to Edinburgh. There his name cropped up by the merest chance, and I was told by Carslogie of Ours that he was present at a shindy in London, where this fellow Holcroft, after having an unprecedented run at cards at a place in St. James Street, was accused of having the ace of trumps up his sleeve, from whence it fell when he was shying a bottle at the accuser's head. He talks to the pater largely of his "place in Essex," or what remains of it. Involved in debt to a ruinous extent, he gave bills right and left, which were dishonoured. £10,000 *had* been raised upon his estate, in which he had only a reversionary interest, and,

when the mortgagees called in their money, and the estate was sold, it did not suffice to pay a tithe of the sums he had raised in every conceivable way, and everyone lost their money all round. Sharp that ! Yet he scraped through without punishment.'

'By Jove !'

'Worse still. Carslogie told me he was suspected of causing a horse to fail in a race through having the bit poisoned ; and how he left a young fellow in the Hussars at Maidstone in the lurch, by refusing at the last moment to ride for him a peculiarly vicious horse, which he had solemnly undertaken to do, and so causing him to lose the race, on which he had most imprudently made a ruinously heavy book.'

'And how did it end ?'

'The report of a pistol that night in the cavalry barrack announced that the Hussar had shot himself—that is all ! And this is the "young man of the period" whom my father's confiding simplicity has made a welcome guest for some weeks back at Dundargue, and thrown into the society of my sister and Olive ! But I shall fully open his eyes the moment our visitor is gone.'

But it was rather a pity for his own sake that Allan did not 'open' Lord Aberfeldie's eyes a little before that event, and such being the character of Mr. Hawke Holcroft, the reader may feel less surprised at some of the things we may have to record of him ere long.

CHAPTER XV.—THE CARPET-DANCE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THOUGH somewhat of the nature of an impromptu affair, the 'carpet-dance' partook of something of a more important kind. Many guests were invited ; the ladies were in semi-toilet and the gentlemen in evening-dress : but the great dancing-room at

Dundargue was decorated to perfection by the care of Mr. Tappleton the butler, the housekeeper, and gardener, with the rarest plants, flowers, and ferns the conservatories could produce, disposed in China and Japanese jars on pedestals and marble console tables of the time of Louis XIV., at whose court a Lord Aberfeldie had once been ambassador.

The fête had been brought about by the two fair cousins as a farewell treat to the last of their present guests, who were departing—Ruby Logan, Stratherroch, and—Mr. Holcroft!

Greatly to Eveline's relief, Sir Paget was gone, but, as if to worry her further, Sir Paget left for her—with Lady Aberfeldie—a letter referring to his admiration and regard for her since the last season in London, and with it a handsome diamond necklet—the sight of which in its fragrant Russian-leather case she loathed—with the hope that she would accept and wear it, in token that she was holding out brilliant hopes to him when 'they met in town again.'

Eveline flatly declined to accept and wear the jewellery, so, to her intense annoyance, it remained as yet in her mother's hands. She was 'biding her time.'

The wealthy suitor had attained a battered middle-age, while Eveline was still in the glory of her youth. True, but he had both wealth and rank to offer, for though she was an 'Honourable Miss,' he was a baronet, and so far as his love went, if it came late in life, it was, nevertheless, a kind of overmastering passion.

The new emotions of her heart caused Eveline to reflect more than perhaps she had ever done before. It seemed but yesterday since she and Olive coned their tasks and practised their scales together under the eyes of a governess; since they had gathered bouquets of wild flowers from the clefts of the rocks of Dundargue, and made fairy caps of rushes and harebells by the burnside; happy children both; but how miserable she was now that she was on the verge of womanhood,

and had learned to love and to hate ; for she loved Evan Cameron, and hated—yes, and she blushed as she admitted it to herself—she did hate that smiling and rubicund old interloper, Sir Paget.

‘And you will not wear the necklet?’ said Lady Aberfeldie, for the last time.

‘Do please to excuse me, dearest mamma—I cannot—yet awhile.’

Lady Aberfeldie was pleased by the half-obedience these words implied.

‘What ornaments will you wear, then?’ she asked. ‘You have so many to choose from.’

‘Let me wear the lovely diamond necklace that lies in the strong casket in your room, mamma.’

Lady Aberfeldie’s calm, patrician face darkened.

‘I would rather you wore no diamonds at all, child ; and these I never wear myself.’

‘But why, mamma?’

‘Because that necklace always brings evil to whoever wears it.’

‘So I have heard. But it is a silly superstition, and they are such lovely stones ! But what is the story of them?’

‘The wife of a cavalier who died with Montrose on the scaffold of Edinburgh gave them to an ancestor of ours to save his life. This was the first viscount, who was a zealous Covenanter, and the bosom friend of Lord Warriston. He certainly took the jewels from the poor sorrowing wife——’

‘And the cavalier?’

‘Was beheaded by the Maiden at the market-cross, and a kind of curse seems to have attended these diamonds ever since.’

‘A cruel story.’

‘But a true one.’

Eveline laughed at the superstition, kissed her cold, proud

mother, and carried her point ; thus, at the time when carriage after carriage was depositing guests at the great arched entrance-hall, Eveline was surveying her figure and face in the mirror with all a young girl's satisfaction and thinking that her slender white throat never looked as it did then, when encircled by the sparkling diamonds of the luckless widow, and Olive at the same time was looking radiant in the Maltese suite of Allan.

How the two last named enjoyed the carpet-dance ! Perfect confidence was so sweetly established between them, they had so many little secrets to tell, so many revelations to make, so many comparisons of mutual hopes and fears, and so forth, while each seemed to exult in the affection of the other, and felt in their hearts the words ascribed to old Catullus :

‘ Let those love now who never loved before ;
Let those who always loved, now love the more ! ’

‘ Those two young fools seem to understand each other and each other's interests at last ! ’ whispered Lord to Lady Aberfeldie, with a smile of amusement.

‘ But there are two *other* young fools present who are doing their best to mar each other's interests,’ was her cold and warning response.

Hawke Holcroft's shifty eyes lowered as he watched the cousins and whirled in a waltz with Ruby Logan or any other girl who came to hand. He was in utter perplexity to find the new footing on which these hitherto strange lovers so suddenly were, and that he himself was, as he felt and thought, ‘ nowhere ! ’

What could she mean ? There was something of radiance in the faces of all the family—even of the sweetly pensive Eveline—all indicative of a new movement that *he* was out of.

‘ As for Olive,’ he muttered, while a sentiment of rage, mingled with avarice and jealousy, grew strong in his heart, ‘ she is an infernal weathercock, but a deuced handsome one ! ’

Ruby Logan was equally puzzled, but found consolation with young Carslogie of the Black Watch, whom Allan had invited to the festivity, and who styled her, with reference to her hair, 'the amber witch.'

'Happy Olive and Allan,' thought Eveline, as she rested for a minute on the arm of Cameron; 'they may have as many round dances as they choose without remark, while mine, with *him*, must be few and far between.'

Her dress was white silk, trimmed with little laurel leaves and crowberry—the latter a delicate attention to Evan, as it is the badge of the Camerons.

'Will you wear my colours to-night?' she asked, as they promenaded at that end of the room which was furthest away from 'papa and mamma.' She broke off a spray and made him a button-hole. 'Allow me to fix it for you,' said Eveline, and deftly she put it in his lapel, while Evan's heart thrilled to feel the touch of her beloved hand—even though gloved—so near his heart, as they swept into another waltz.

'Aberfeldie,' said the hostess to her husband, 'I feel certain that Evan Cameron is in love with our Eveline.'

Lord Aberfeldie had no doubt about it whatever now, but he only said: 'He would be a fool to be otherwise.'

'But that is not what we seek!'

'Certainly not; but all young fellows have fancies; and he will be gone from this in a few hours now.'

'Thank Heaven, yes!' responded Lady Aberfeldie devoutly.

'By the way, why did you permit her to wear those unlucky diamonds?'

'She pled so hard, and then the idea of their bringing evil is so behind the age.'

'Behind the age or not, something untoward or unlucky always accompanies their appearance in public. They should have been sent to Bond Street long ago.'

And Lord Aberfeldie smiled on her affectionately, as at that

moment he could not help thinking how handsome and young his wife looked in her costume of rich ruby velvet, trimmed at the square cut neck and arms with the finest white old lace, while jewels that an empress might have worn glittered in her ears and hair.

Replacing sometimes the professional musicians, making themselves useful at the piano, and playing certainly good dance music, were two—the ‘mermaids,’ as Holcroft called them—the minister’s daughters, who were usually so fond of warbling that they ‘were under the blue sea.’

He knew nothing of what Allan had learned concerning him—of the light Carslogie had thrown on his private life; thus, whatever change had come over the spirit of Olive’s dream, he deemed it necessary to ask her for, at least, one round dance as usual; and Allan watched them with a haughty grimace on his features as they danced it in a silent manner that was peculiar and rather oppressive to both. The moment it was over, and he handed her back to a seat, Holcroft took refuge in the refreshment-room, where Mr. Tappleton gave him a foaming glass of sparkling champagne.

Young Cameron was rather grave, Allan thought, but the former was oppressed by one idea then, that on the morrow he would have to report himself at the headquarters of the Black Watch, and he gazed like one in a dream at the dancers whirling round him; so Allan took him to task and strove to rally him.

‘Why so sad, old fellow? You’re down on your luck, somehow,’ said he.

‘Because, Graham,’ replied Cameron, with a forced smile, ‘there are times when I am inclined to ask with Mr. Mallock, “Is life worth living?”’

‘Of course it is—but how with you?’

‘Well,’ replied Cameron, with whom just then one bitter thought was more than usually keen, ‘dipped nigh to sinking

as my place of Stratherroch is, I don't see so much to live for, and certainly deuced little to live upon.'

'Don't take this gloomy view, old fellow, said Allan cheerfully.

'It is very well for you to take a jolly view of the world, Allan—you, the son of a peer, and engaged to——'

'Take heart, man; we've lots of life before us—life in Egypt perhaps. There is Eveline sitting alone; take another turn with her, and then we'll have some of Mumms' extra dry together.'

Eveline had opened an album as Cameron drew near her, but closed it instantly, as the first photo that met her eyes was a fine cabinet one of Sir Paget. There was an expression of pensive sweetness in her otherwise radiant face, for she, poor girl, never for a moment forgot that a parting—too probably a final one it might prove—was close at hand now, and, after the two past delightful months, how dreary would the future seem!

'Are you tired?' said a tender voice in her ear; 'it is our dance, I think—but would you rather sit it out?'

'A little promenade rather.'

He bowed, and, rising, she took his proffered arm. They made a circuit of the room once or twice, and then, lured no doubt by the coolness and seclusion of a long corridor, entered it, unnoticed as they thought; but the watchful gaze of Lady Aberfeldie had followed them.

There was much to see in this long, stately, and vaulted corridor, and its deeply embayed windows overlooking the rock on which the oldest part of Dundargue is perched. Its floor was of parqueterie; its walls of wainscot, with massively framed old pictures; some trophies of arms and family armour hung there, and the windows were furnished with ancient stone seats and modern stained glass, through which the radiance of the setting sun was contending with the dim-shaded lamps.

Specimens of unique china and frail goblets of Venetian

glass, with other objects of 'bigotry and virtue,' as Holcroft had called them, were there in oaken cabinets and on exquisite brackets. Among other things, on a pedestal, skilfully stuffed, the last golden eagle that had been shot at the Birks of Aberfeldie, by the gun of Dugald Glas, a glorious bird that measured five feet from tip to tip of his shining pinions; yet none of these things caught the attention of the two promenaders.

Her hand was on his arm; involuntarily that arm pressed the soft and tremulous fingers which rested there, and in another moment his hand stole over them without their being withdrawn — nay, it seemed as if their load became more heavy.

Eveline was not unaware that there was something morally wrong in the situation; but, then, 'the situation had its charm.'

'Eveline!'

Cameron had never before ventured to call her by her Christian name, nor, until it passed his lips half unconsciously now, had he an intention of so uttering it; but that utterance seemed scarcely a new revelation to the girl.

Soft and lovely was the shy smile upon her upturned face as they stood within the deep bay of a window. Was it that smile, or what, that dazed Evan Cameron and swept his senses away? but he caught her suddenly in his arms and kissed her lips and eyes, whispering, 'Oh! Eveline, my darling—my darling!'

And then there was a pause, full of sighs of happiness. 'The stone was cast into the water, and the still lake broke up into a stormy sea, where there would be peace and quiet no more!' No more, at least, unless the future held some happiness for these two poor loving hearts.

'Have I done wrong?' said Cameron, in a breathless voice, after a little time; 'God knows I never meant that you should see how dearly, how desperately, and how hopelessly I love

you when I let the precious secret escape me as I did ; but it is done now.'

She was pale as death and trembling violently, as she thought of her mother ; yet she nestled closely and clingingly to him.

'You love me, Eveline?'

'Can you ask?' she whispered. 'Yes—oh, yes—Evan.'

He was intoxicated, and drew her close to him again. Such a moment comes but once in life—once only!

'Let us go now—we shall be missed,' said Eveline.

'Oh, stay one moment longer, darling.'

'Mamma, if we could only get her to be our friend, all might be right and go well.'

'Even with my poverty, Eveline?'

'Don't call it so. Yes, papa always gives in to her in the long run.'

Cameron sighed.

'Are you two practising for amateur theatricals, or admiring the stars through the stained glass?' said the voice of Lord Aberfeldie suddenly.

We have said that the eyes of his wife had followed the pair, and hence no doubt his lordship's sudden appearance in the dimly lighted corridor. Both were painfully confused.

How much had Lord Aberfeldie overseen, how much had he overheard, or how little of both? It was impossible for them to guess, but he good-naturedly affected not to see all his mind took in.

Cameron felt that he had nothing to explain, to urge, or to utter, but bowed, smiled a very hollow smile indeed, and led his partner back to the dancing-room, where neither waltzed more that evening, as the impromptu affair was over, the guests were departing, and Lord Aberfeldie was beginning to think that the diamonds of the legend were already producing their evil results in this the first untoward event in the young life of his daughter.

Allan and Cameron, avoiding Holcroft, sat long that night in the former's room smoking and imbibing brandy-and-soda, but no word escaped the lover of what had passed in the corridor ; and, sooth to say, full of Olive and himself, Allan had never missed the pair from the dancing-room.

Cameron was to leave Dundargue betimes next morning, so he bade farewell to his comrade, who charged him with remembrances to 'all our fellows of the Black Watch'; and anon Cameron found himself alone with his own loving, exulting, sad, and anxious thoughts, and with the little bouquet—a dwarf laurel leaf and sprig of crowberry—dearer to him then than even his Victoria Cross !

Again and again did he rehearse that sweet episode in the dimly lit corridor, and again and again in the time to come would it return with sorrowful reiteration to his heart and memory !

Eveline loved him ! Her own lips had acknowledged it, her kisses seemed still to linger on his lips ; but to what end—my God ! he exclaimed, in bitterness of heart, to what end ? Again and again he thought over her plaintive and child-like wish, 'if we could only get mamma to be our friend,' and all that wish suggested. Her mother suspected much, he feared, and that her father knew all. Sir Paget, with his colossal wealth, was looming in the distance like a simoon to the newly dawned love ; and poor Evan could but come to the terrible conclusion that, like too many others, his penniless love could only be a hopeless one.

So wore the night away—the last, Cameron was assured, he would ever spend in Dundargue ; and morning came.

Unslept, Cameron made rapidly the prosaic preparations for his departure, and a valet had borne off his portmanteaus, rugs, and gun-case to the entrance hall, where the sleepy Mr. Tappleton and a wagonette awaited him.

As he was about to descend the great, silent staircase,

suddenly Eveline, fully dressed for the day and softly slippered, stood before him, her mignonne face very pale, and her soft hazel eyes inflamed by past weeping.

‘Evan!’

‘My darling!’

No housemaids were about as yet, and no prying eyes were there, nor had Ronald Gair with his pipes blown *reveille*.

‘I could not let you go without—without one word of farewell,’ she sobbed.

Long and mute was their embrace, and the heart of Cameron swelled as if to bursting with mingled love and gratitude. He pressed her to it. It was their parting embrace, and both seemed to feel in it that which a writer has described as ‘the vibration of an agony.’

‘I feel as if I were bereft of reason!’ he whispered.

‘My poor Evan—my own dear love!’ cooed the girl. One kiss more, and he was gone.

When or where, if ever, would they meet again?

Eveline had nervously and sedulously avoided Sir Paget till the time of *his* departure; and, when he did leave Dundargue in the dawn, he was only seen off by the old butler; but Evan Cameron had an unexpected farewell caress, the memory of a sad, soft, and clinging kiss that he was to take away with him to what he deemed the land of bondage, and tearful eyes watched his wagonette as it passed down the avenue and out upon the high road that led to the railway.

Evan looked backwards at the tall and stately pile of Dundargue, on which the rays of the rising sun shone redly, and deep in his heart he envied Carslogie, who was to remain behind for a couple of days’ shooting. Yet wherefore should he envy any man while Eveline loved him? was his after-thought.

And she, poor girl, seemed to feel herself left most terribly alone with her sorrow—alone amid her loving family and splendid surroundings, and, with Evan’s words of love lingering

in her ear, she was soon bidden to school herself to think of Sir Paget, and Sir Paget Puddicombe only! 'The human creature,' it has been written, 'who would have suited us to every fibre of our being we have not found, or, having found, have not possessed; but (perhaps) undervalued, and so allowed to pass out of our lives.'

These two suited each other 'to a fibre,' as our author quaintly puts it, and in perfect unanimity of sentiment; and yet for all that they may be compelled to pass out of each other's lives, and live those lives far, far apart.

Under her mother's scrutiny Eveline strove hard to dissemble, and on receiving her morning kiss said: 'Well, mamma, no evil has come of the wearing the diamonds—Dundargue has not taken fire.'

'No, child—indeed, good has come!'

'How, mamma?'

'This morning's mail has brought an enclosure for you—the formal proposal of Sir Paget.'

Eveline was stricken dumb, but thought to herself: 'Unhappy I—*evil* has come!'

And ere noon was passed she was taken to task by her father in the library, prompted by her mother, no doubt.

He drew her to him caressingly, and interlacing his fingers upon her head, drew her soft cheek upon his breast.

'I think, Eveline,' said he, 'you may know by this time how well I love you.'

'I do, indeed, papa,' replied Eveline, in a low voice, but feeling her heart sink under this unusual prelude nevertheless.

'And yet you have been deluding me.'

'Deluding you—I, papa?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, how?'

'By encouraging—pardon me, not that—rather by permitting a visitor to encourage certain hopes. That, you know, it is impossible I should view with favour.'

‘You mean—you mean——’ stammered Eveline, recalling the episode in the corridor.

‘Evan Cameron.’

‘He is gone,’ said she, with difficulty restraining her tears.

‘To darken the door of Dundargue no more ! Not that I have any fault to find with poor Cameron—a brave fellow who has won his V.C., and is a Black Watch man to boot ; but he is Laird of Stratherroch only in name ; his purse does not come up to the requisite standard, and may never do so till both your heads are grey ; but he is gone, as you say, and we shall think of him no more. I have other brighter, better, and richer views for you, my dear child, and I hope you will not disappoint us all. Sir Paget loves you, and you will think seriously over all this ?’

‘How can I do otherwise, papa ?’ was the dubious response, and the girl stole away to her own room. So wearing the diamonds seemed only to be bringing about a sudden crisis in the affairs of herself and the banished Evan Cameron, for such she deemed him.

And, ere she went to bed that night, Eveline, poor girl, strove to pray that she might have some guide or assistance up the stony and thorny path which she feared was before her now in life ; but she no longer now had the deep and unbroken sleep that had ever been her lot the moment her soft cheek touched the pillow. Too nervous to sleep alone, she crept in beside Olive, and, nestling her little face in the white bosom of her cousin, wept long and bitterly.

But events were now to occur that caused even the brilliant proposal of Sir Paget to be forgotten.

CHAPTER XVI.—MYSTERY.

So all the guests had quitted Dundargue now but Hawke Holcroft. In two days he was to depart for what he called ‘his

chambers in town'; thus Allan was compelled to continue his polite dissimulation, and be on suave and apparently easy terms with him as a guest, though the latter felt that there was an undefinable change in his manner towards him.

Indeed, it was only by a great effort of self-control that the Master of Aberfeldie, a man with the highest and keenest sense of honour, and knowing all he did, continued to treat Holcroft with politeness; but he writhed and shivered when he heard him, in the drawing-room or elsewhere, address Olive or Eveline.

All the forenoon after Cameron's departure, when poor little Eveline was most *triste* and miserable, our other pair of lovers were very happy. They had what they were pleased to call 'a picnic' on the tower-head of Dundargue. Allan's portion thereof was cigars, and Olive's a little basket of purple grapes and luscious strawberries (though the season was autumn) from the hothouses.

So with these two, the hours passed sweetly and swiftly, with the blue sky overhead, while far away in the distance, and steeped in sunny haze, stretched the lovely Carse of Gowrie; and talking of themselves, their past folly, their present joy, and the brilliant future that was to come, they biled and cooed after the fashion of all lovers since flowers grew in Eden.

Allan lolled at length on the stone bartizan of the tower whence molten lead and arrows had more than once been launched on a foe beneath, Olive with her fair head reclined against his shoulder toying with her fruit, while he did so with her silky hair, or kissed her lips and hands, and called her all manner of funny and endearing names that would look rather odd in print; and yet amid their present happiness it was strange that each wondered, more than once, if coldness or estrangement would ever come between them again.

Never—oh, never.

'You complained that the gardeners saw me kissing you in

the rosery yesterday, Olive,' said Allan. 'Now, little woman, who should I kiss if I don't kiss you. Well, only the crows overhead can see us up here, at all events.'

But now as he toyed with her hands, marvelling as he did so at their whiteness and beauty, and anon played with the bangles that encircled her rounded arms, he bethought of the one worn—yes, actually *worn*—by Holcroft, and silently he resolved to possess himself of it without delay; so, ere the bell rang for luncheon, he made an excuse, conducted his cousin, with many a pause and long delay which were not idly spent, down the dark and winding staircase from the head of the tower.

In his new-found happiness until now he had forgotten all about the bangle, which—perhaps for some ulterior purpose of his own—Holcroft seemed to have quietly appropriated, and by whom he wished it returned without any fuss or explanation.

To this end he sought that personage after luncheon was over, and was sure he would find him either practising strokes in the billiard-room, in the smoking-room, or stables, watching the horses and catching hints from the grooms.

He found him in the first-named place, cue in hand.

'Ready for a game?' said he.

'No, thanks.'

'Sorry; Cameron and everyone is gone. I'm reduced to playing the right hand against the left.'

'And while playing I perceive that you have a gold bangle of Miss Raymond's on your left wrist?'

'Yes,' replied Holcroft leisurely — Allan thought impatiently.

'Did she give it to you?'

'Why do you ask?'

'*Did* she give it to you?' repeated Allan, with a dangerous gleam in his dark eyes.

‘No.’

‘How comes it to be there, then?’

‘Don’t take to high falutin. I slipped it on in mere fun, and it will not come off again.’

‘Indeed! allow me.’

And Allan, in a moment, by twisting the ductile Indian gold, wrenched it off, and Holcroft’s eyes had a malevolent flash in them as he stooped to strike a ball.

‘Thanks,’ said Allan, pocketing the bangle. ‘Now we shall have a cigar.’

For a moment he felt a little ashamed of his sudden irritation, and proffered his cigar-case to Holcroft, who smiled his thanks and accepted a Havana.

The Master was younger and handsomer than he; the heir to an ancient title and estate; he had the envied prestige of having borne himself bravely when under fire with the Black Watch, and had a goodly crop of medals—not so many as my Lord Wolseley, of course—but still, when in uniform, a goodly display.

He had all the advantages over Hawke Holcroft that one man could have over another; and in his heart of hearts the other hated—yea, with a bitter and deadly hate—Allan Graham—a hate beyond his love, real or supposed, for Olive Raymond, nathless all Olive’s beauty and her money—his chief lure and incentive.

While conversing and joking together in the smoking-room or on the terrace, amid the pleasures of the table, knocking the balls about at billiards or so forth, how little could the unconscious Allan have dreamed that his father’s guest—the son of his old friend—had been pondering over the art of ‘Killing no murder’; of accidents brought about in the hunting-field, at cover-shooting, or hill-climbing; even of dynamite cigars! Had he not heard of such things at Monaco, Homburg, and elsewhere?

He knew that there was quite a manufactory of such cigars at Temeswar, in Austria; but wherever were such pleasant gifts 'to be obtained in an out-of-the-way hole like the Carse of Gowrie'?

His teeth under his moustache glittered or glistened whitely when such ideas occurred to him; though he chatted away with perhaps forced *insouciance* and gaiety, under all his assumed ease of manner there smouldered a lava-like glow—mingled hate of Allan and coveting of Olive, but with an emotion of a much coarser nature, combined with greed.

Seeing Clairette, Olive's maid, passing, Allan made up the bangle in a little packet, as he still wished no more explanations on the subject, and desired her to give it to her mistress.

'You and Miss Raymond seem exceedingly good friends now,' said Holcroft.

'We were never otherwise,' replied Allan curtly, and displeased by the remark.

'What a prize in matrimony such a girl must be, with so much beauty and—wealth!'

'It is sometimes a misfortune for a girl to be rich, or to be thought so,' said Allan.

'Why?'

'Because she may become the prey of some needy fortune-hunter or enterprising scamp.'

Holcroft winced at the reply, though it was made casually and without the least design by Allan.

'But, in marrying, Miss Raymond might perhaps be poor enough.'

'What paradox is this?' asked Holcroft, thoroughly interested, while Allan felt some disdain at discussing such matters with such a man.

'Yes, poor as a church mouse, unless——'

'Unless what?'

'She marries *me*,' replied Allan, who, with perhaps pardonable

pique, only thought of provoking a man who had tried to rival him, and whom he deemed a needy and adventurous gambler.

This seemed only to corroborate what Holcroft had heard before, and gave him some occasion for thought.

‘I have heard rumours of a family compact—a most fortunate one for you,’ said he, smiling; ‘but suppose you—excuse me for saying so—were to predecease her?’

‘Then my pretty cousin would be a free woman; but I don’t mean to die yet awhile. Let us take a turn before dinner,’ he added, to change the conversation he had no desire to continue.

‘Where?’

‘Anywhere you like; but, as the evening has become chill, suppose we smoke our cigars in the picture-gallery?’

‘All right, I am your man.’

Had Allan looked at Hawke Holcroft just then, he might have perceived a lurid gleam in his stealthy eyes, and how his hands were clenched till the nails of his fingers bruised the palms thereof.

Olive received her bangle, and though startled by the abruptness with which it was returned, without message or explanation from Allan, as Clairette told her, she thought less of the circumstance then than she did a day or two after.

Dinner was announced; Holcroft appeared in accurate evening dress as usual, and after waiting a few minutes for Allan, who did not appear, the meal was proceeded with in the slow fashion peculiar to Dundargue, though only five were seated at table. Ere dessert came, Lady Aberfeldie dispatched a servant to Allan’s room in search of him. He was not there, though his evening dress was laid out as usual.

‘Where can he be? Where can he have gone?’ were the queries on all hands, which, as night began to draw on without his appearing, took the form of alarm, ‘and what can have happened?’

‘Did Allan drop hints of going anywhere?’ asked Lord Aberfeldie.

All answered ‘No.’

‘It is most mysterious.’

Still more mysterious did it appear when the night passed without his being seen, and when his place was still vacant at the breakfast-table next day. Lord Aberfeldie was in dire perplexity; the ladies were pale and already betook themselves to tears.

‘If Allan has left the house as suddenly as he did before, he had taken neither clothes nor portmanteau with him, as Tappleton assures me; so what can it mean?’ exclaimed Lord Aberfeldie.

A gun was *missing* from the gun-room. Could Allan have gone to shoot with Logan at Loganlee? But Olive deemed it impossible that he would do so without consulting her, and on looking at Holcroft she thought he looked rather hot and disturbed.

‘The bangle, the bangle!’ thought the girl, with sudden terror. ‘Can he have gone in a fit of jealousy? Mercy! if it should be so.’

Inquiries proved that Allan had not passed out by the entrance gates, as the lodge-keeper affirmed, and no trace of footsteps could be found at any of the private gates to the grounds; and it was soon discovered that he had not taken a ticket for any place at the railway station. What terrible mystery was here? The family began to look with growing alarm and dismay blankly into each other’s pale faces. Keepers and gillies, strong, active, and keen-sighted fellows, Hector, Alister Bain, Angus and Dugal Glas—even old Ronald Gair, the piper—searched, but in vain, the grounds, plantations, even the adjacent hills and glens; but not a trace was found of the missing Allan. He seemed suddenly to have dropped out of existence. As this, his last day at Dundargue, drew on, none

made himself more active in searching and riding about the roads than Holcroft, and so preoccupied were all that no one—even Olive—noticed that his face was pale and cadaverous—and wore a very disturbed expression, and that his pale eyes seemed to glare defiantly if anyone looked at him, while he sedulously kept his *right hand gloved*.

How are we to relate all that really had happened?

CHAPTER XVII.—A MODERN USE FOR A MEDIEVAL INSTITUTION.

‘THE world is not a bad world, after all,’ said Allan, as he and Holcroft, after a casual glance at the long lines of portraits panelled in the wainscoting of the gallery, together with many a Cuyp, Zuccherò, Canaletti, and so forth, now looked out from one of the lofty windows upon the fair domain of his family, that spread for miles around Dundargue.

‘It is easy enough of you to talk thus of the world,’ thought Holcroft, ‘but if, like me, you had only debts and difficulties for your patrimony you might take a different view.’

‘I was born here in Dundargue, and all the happy memories of my childhood centre round it,’ said Allan. ‘Every man, woman, and child in the place are known to me; every rock and hill, glen and woodland, familiar, with all their stories and traditions; and wherever I might be with the Black Watch, in England on the staff, far away in central India, or in the gorges of Afghanistan, my memory always fled home to dear old Dundargue and all its surroundings.’

‘How pathetic!’ sneered Holcroft, silently, and puzzled to understand the mood of Allan, who, in the consciousness of his own happiness with Olive, felt at that moment rather inclined to take a soft and generous view of the world at large.

‘It certainly is a fine old ancestral house—one to be proud

of,' said Holcroft, aloud, 'with a special history, and all that sort of thing. I have heard a devil of a deal about its oubliette—where is it?'

'Let me show you—come this way,' said Allan, lighting a fresh cigar.

Smoking together, Allan, and Holcroft following, wandered up and down circular stone stairs in narrow turrets, where the steps had been worn and hollowed by the feet of long-departed generations; through dusky corridors where, in some places, moth-eaten arras hung upon its rusty tenter-hooks, and where, as Holcroft said, there was 'a loud smell of mice'; through secret doors and past 'the priest's hole,' in which James of Jerusalem abode, till they reached a narrow stone passage near the summit of the great tower, closed by a massive little door. Allan threw this open, and the black, round mouth of the oubliette, about four feet in diameter, yawned before them. The great, horizontal stone slab or flagstone, which in ancient times had closed the mouth of this horrible accessory to feudal tyranny, had long since given place to a massive trap-door of oak, which was held up by a wooden prop, under which the cold, dark vault showed its mysterious profundity.

'By Jove! it is a strange affair; more like a draw-well than anything else.'

'But supposed to be twelve feet diameter at the bottom—a fine old relic of the days when "warriors bold wore spurs of gold," and the rack and the red-hot ploughshare were aids to the orthodox opinions of society in religion and politics.'

And Allan laughed as he spoke.

'How foetid its atmosphere is! That door has not been open for an age, and may be closed for as long again. No one ever comes here.'

Peering downward, as if into a well, they saw the outlines of their heads reflected in a little pool of water at the bottom, but how far down it was impossible to say.

Once upon a time,' said Allan, 'when parts of the Carse of Gowrie were under water, in wet seasons especially, it flowed in here, how no one knew, unless through fissures in the rock, and drowned like a rat any luckless wight who was thrown in to be—to be——'

'What?'

'Forgotten. So the phrase went then; hence its name.'

'And do you mean to say that no one who was dropped into that confounded hole ever came up again?'

'Yes.'

'Were their cries not heard?'

'No; the walls around are so thick, and the bottom is in the living rock on which Dundargue stands.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Holcroft again, as if perplexed, so much so that he had let his cigar grow cold. 'And their bones?' he asked, after a pause.

'Were found in quantities by certain explorers, who went down with torches, some years ago. I have not looked into this place for years—not since I left for the regiment in India,' said Allan, stooping, somewhat dangerously—and, to Holcroft's sudden idea, somewhat temptingly—over the dangerous profundity into which he was striving to peer.

With all the rapidity of light, many terrible thoughts now crowded into the mind of Holcroft. He hated Allan Graham with deadly rivalry and hate combined. Never again, in the desperation of his affairs, might he have the chance of an introduction to such a prize as Olive Raymond, or be on such a footing as he had recently found himself with her. He loathed Allan for all Allan possessed, and, as we are told, 'a coward who knows himself to be at once despised but unchastised, for a woman's sake, can hate.'

If he lost his chances with Olive, beggary stared him in the face; drops of perspiration started to his forehead, and chance now confirmed his diabolical resolution. The gloomy fiend

was uppermost ; his revenge, and perhaps future triumph, stood embodied before him. He did not pause, and all these dire thoughts occurred to him in less than the space of one vibration of a pendulum. Had the Master of Aberfeldie turned sharply round he might have read in Holcroft's white face an expression that was not pleasant to look upon just then—the face of one that would work him mischief if he could ; but the unwitting Allan was doing what he had not done since boyhood, he was peering with vague curiosity into the profundity below. A fury, a clamorous anxiety, seemed to blaze up in the heart and brain of Holcroft, who was a practised 'bruiser,' and he suddenly gave Allan an awful blow under the left ear—a blow hit right out from the shoulder—that shot him headlong into the vault. He vanished from the light ; there was a heavy thud far down below, and then all became still—unnaturally so ; but Holcroft could hear the beating of his own pulses, while the blood seemed to be surging about his throbbing temples. Was he acting in a dream from which he would waken to find himself in bed ? or was all this happening, not to him, but to some one else ? No, there was the bruised right hand, from which the violence of his blow had torn the skin. He had read of dark crimes, of *murders*, but little did he think he would ever become the participator in such a deed ; but opportunity is always the devil's game. For a minute—an eternity it seemed, by the chaos of his mind, the sudden inversion of all thought—he did not breathe, he scarcely seemed to live. There was a whisper of 'murder' on his lips, and it seemed to have an echo, that terrible whisper, but whether from the walls, the trees that waved below them, the blue sky, or the crows that were winging their way through it, he knew not. He seemed to whisper the awful word to himself, with quivering lips, again and again, as if he required an assurance of its truth, and then sought to rouse himself from his lethargic stupor, quit the scene of his sudden crime, and

seek safety in flight—flight! But, then, to quit Dundargue thus would fix suspicion on himself. Had not Clairette, the French maid, seen him but lately with Allan? And flight would mar the very object for which he had committed the crime. Should he—could he—at all risks to himself and his fortune, ere it was too late, strive to undo what he had done; to give an alarm, and make some excuse or explanation ere life had departed from the shattered frame of his victim, or leave the latter to his obscure fate—a grave under his father's roof! Cowardice and meanness, hatred, jealousy, and avarice, all suggested the latter.

He knew not the depth of this strange prison, or how far down beneath the foundations of lofty Dundargue, and into the rock on which it stands, the sill or floor of the noisome vault might be. He listened; not a sound came upward, nor was there any, save the wild beating of his own heart and the buzzing and singing of blood in his ears. He softly closed the wooden trap-door, let the enormous iron hasp thereof drop over the rusty staple; he closed the massive external entrance, and stealthily crept or glided away. There seemed a silence all around him now; such a silence as must have appalled the soul of the first murderer when he 'rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him.'

So the tragedy—the dark crime—was acted as suddenly as it was weird—suggested by a whisper of the devil! There was nothing very tragic in the accessories of the scene; but, as an author says, 'Are not real tragedies, the social tragedies that go on about us in our every-day life, enacted like comedies, until the last moment, when the curtain falls, and all is dark?' Pale as death in visage (he felt himself to be so), stealthy in step and eye, he stole away to his own apartment in a modern part of the mansion. How he reached it he never knew, but mechanically of course, and he blessed his stars that he reached it unseen. He took a long pull at the brandy flask—tore off

his collar and necktie, and cast himself half fainting on his bed, where he lay panting and gasping heavily. Every sound that came to his ear, every step that approached, seemed to Hawke Holcroft the herald of discovery, and he longed with the most intense nervous intensity to leave this loathed Dundargue behind him !

Was the Master dying there or dead outright? Where he lay no sound could ever reach the external air. But had not his victim assured him that no cry could ever come from there—the place was so deep—so remote? Would the next evening, when he was to depart, never come? Then he had the meals, the family, and their surmises to face! He had a haggard and hunted look that evening and all next day, which Lord Aberfeldie, in the kindness of his heart, amid all his own new anxiety, attributed to the pressure of his monetary affairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.—HOLCROFT DEPARTS.

It was a considerable relief to Holcroft's mind to perceive that this second abrupt disappearance of Allan excited more surprise than alarm in his family circle; and in her own thoughts Lady Aberfeldie secretly connected it with some lovers' quarrel between him and Olive; it was so like their past relations that some such folly should intervene. The bell for dinner sounded much earlier than usual, as Mr. Holcroft was to depart for the south that evening, and to see him in the drawing-room dressed *de rigueur* in black, with spotless shirt-front and diamond studs, with tie and collar perfect, his hair brushed with precision, and the ends of his tawny moustache waxed out to sharp points, who could have imagined him an actor in that scene in the distant arched passage, or connected him with *what* was lying at the bottom of that deep, dark oubliette!

Holcroft always thought that great games involved serious

hazards ; but now this was a hazard beyond all his previous calculations. The greatest chance of fortune he had ever seen in his varied life seemed to be slipping—or to have speedily slipped—away from him, when Olive Raymond and her cousin suddenly appeared on such amicable terms ; savage emotions of mingled disappointment and revenge filled his heart, and certainly he had given full swing to them ! Now, what he had done was over ; the rubicon had been passed. He was—what he dared not name himself ; the thought of all that Allan Graham must endure ere he died (if he was not already dead) was—at times, but at times only—maddening even to his destroyer ; and he felt that he could not too soon place miles upon miles between himself and Dundargue ; and that, happen what might, he would never set foot in Dundargue again. Seated at that luxurious table with the hospitable father, the patrician-like mother, the tender sister and brilliant *fiancée* of him he had slain, with stately liveried valets in attendance, while longing for the conveyance or carriage that was to take him to the station, he *did* feel more than once as if he would go mad if it lasted much longer—this acting—this tension of the heart—but, as we say, for a time only. He was too near the scene of his awful crime not to feel his soul shrink with selfish horror and dismay, which made him nervously twist up, roll, and unroll his *serviette*, as it is called in Scotland.

Was it only a few hours since he had heard that terrible *thud* amid the darkness and the clash of the oak trap-door ? And there were *his* family all seated with him—Holcroft—at the same table, all unconscious of what was lying within a few yards of them, and yet not considering him the blackest criminal in the world, but a departing guest to be treated with kindness and courtesy. Thank Heaven, he would be far away from them ere Allan would be found to be hopelessly gone, and he would see nothing of their growing misery. To drown thought, care, and memory, Holcroft, after the ladies retired to

the drawing-room, imbibed systematically more than usual. Ere this, Olive had thought his manner excited—strange only. Unused to see men under the influence of wine, she thought no more of it. But, as Holcroft took to ‘lacing’ his clicquot with brandy when occasion served, that may account for some of the peculiar remarks to Olive yet to be recorded.

From an early period Eveline had conceived a shuddering kind of aversion of Holcroft—an emotion not rare in certain nervous organizations like hers; nor could she have explained why more particularly *now* his presence, though at table as usual, had filled her with an undefined distrust and dread; yet so it was. But in the drawing-room her own thoughts came more than ever back to her, and these were all of Evan Cameron.

‘He is gone!’ she was always whispering to herself; ‘too probably for ever and for ever. We shall never meet again. How dull my world will seem without Evan, and how old and queer I begin to feel already!’

But poor Eveline knew not what a small place the world is—nowadays especially.’

‘You seem rather out of sorts,’ said Lord Aberfeldie, who had been eyeing ‘his old friend’s son,’ while pushing the decanters towards him; ‘I hope there is nothing wrong with you, especially as this is your last evening here.’

‘No nothing very wrong,’ stammered Holcroft, scarcely knowing what to say, but driven to shelter himself under what was his normal condition; ‘it is only—only——’

‘What?’

‘I have had more than one annoying letter,’ he said, with a kind of gasp, and paused.

‘About money—of course?’ said Lord Aberfeldie.

‘One was a threat from a tailor,’ replied Holcroft, making a terrible effort to appear facetious, ‘who says if I don’t pay him he will take means to make me do so.’

‘And you?’

‘Wrote back that I was delighted to hear he had the means, as this was more than I had.’

‘Well, my dear fellow, your father was one of my oldest friends ; for his sake can I square it for you ?’

‘Oh, Lord Aberfeldie, don’t think of that !’

‘What’s the total ?’ asked the other, opening a davenport.

‘Close on £500,’ said Holcroft, with an effort, which certainly was an emotion, but not gratitude.

‘There, Holcroft—pay me when you can, or choose,’ said Lord Aberfeldie, throwing down his pen, closing the davenport, and handing a cheque for the sum named to his guest, to stop whose thanks he plunged at once into the inevitable story of the charge of the Black Watch along the Kourgané Hill ; how he fell wounded ; and how, but for Holcroft’s father, ‘a squad of infernal Russians,’ etc., and so forth.

‘Another glass of Moët, and then we shall join the ladies.’

‘Life is a hard game with some of us now,’ said Holcroft, as he pocketed his cheque. ‘As some one has written, “Men cannot go freebooting or looting now, except in business ; and it is quite a question whether a modern *promoter* is not quite as respectable a member of society as a riever used to be, in the old days when right was might.”’

‘And Dundargue was built,’ added Lord Aberfeldie, laughing.

‘I did not say so.’

‘Ah, but you thought it.’

And now they rose from the table. Holcroft was not the better, but rather the worse for his potations. He had eaten little and drunk much. Thus he looked very pale—almost ghastly ; and a strange fixed grinness replaced occasionally the usual restlessness of his shifty pale eyes and freckled face. Curiously enough he had hovering in his mind a kind of vengeance just then at Olive. But for her sudden and, as he thought, capricious preference for her cousin, and throwing *him* so completely over, the deed he had committed would never

have been done. Eveline had withdrawn to her room, whither her mother had followed her, bent on worry and expostulation no doubt; Lord Aberfeldie was required by his steward, and Holcroft found Olive seated alone in a bay window of the drawing-room, watching the last rays of the sun fading out behind the Sidlaw Hills.

‘Another hour—even less, Miss Raymond—and my place here will be vacant,’ said he, in a low and unnatural voice, while attempting to hang over her chair in his old fashion.

‘I got back my bangle, thanks,’ said she, a little irrelevantly, but feeling a necessity for saying something.

‘Have you forgotten all that passed between us before and after you allowed me to retain it?’

‘I never allowed you to retain it, nor aught of mine, save perhaps a bud from a bouquet. I have not forgotten that you, apparently, sought to do me a great honour, Mr. Holcroft; but I scarcely thought, even then, that you were serious.’

‘Serious! Did you not know that I loved you better than my own life?’

‘I cannot listen to this kind of thing,’ said she, rising with positive hauteur and annoyance in her face and manner; ‘you forget yourself.’

‘When with you I always do—forgive me!’

‘I cannot forgive you for talking to me thus.’

‘You used not to dislike me, I know; and now there is no sacrifice I would not make to win your love——’

‘Permit me to pass!’ exclaimed Olive, but he barred her way, and now a glow of half-tipsy rage seemed to possess him.

‘Listen, Olive Raymond,’ said he, in a low, concentrated and almost fierce tone; ‘I have dared and risked much for you—more than you can conceive. There has seldom been aught that I have sworn to possess that has not in time been mine—mine, do you hear! To those who wait, their time and turn always come. I have sworn to possess you, and woe to the man who comes between us.’

She regarded him with a haughty and scared yet scornful eye. She saw now that this melodrama was the result of wine.

‘Do you think you could compel me to love you?’ she asked, with a provoking smile.

‘No.’

‘What then?’

‘To marry me.’

‘Under what pressure, sir?’

‘That is my secret—in time you may find it out,’ he added, bowing to her with ominous, not mock, politeness, as she passed him with a haughty stare, and left the room. ‘She forgets that I have yet her photo, with her own name written on the back in her own hand; and if ever man put the screw on a woman by such a little thing as that, I shall put it on you, Olive Raymond, if you continue to play my Lady Disdain to me!’

And for a moment he cast after her retiring figure a glance of sardonic hate a devil might have emulated.

‘Good-bye,’ he muttered, mockingly, ‘is an unpleasant thing to say; with us let it be *au revoir* rather; perhaps she may yet wave a damp pocket-handkerchief from the outward wall as I ride away; who knows?’

‘Sorry to say time is up, my dear fellow,’ said Lord Aberfeldie, entering the room with his hat and driving gloves; ‘make your adieux to the ladies. There is little doubt that Allan has gone to Loganlee—the covers are first-rate there. I’ll just drive over and see, dropping you and your traps at the railway station *en passant*.’

A few minutes more and the pair were tooling down the avenue in a smart mail phaeton, drawn by a pair of fine, high-stepping dark greys. So Lord Aberfeldie drove ‘the son of his oldest friend’ to the station, and, as the distance increased between himself and Dundargue, Holcroft’s spirits revived, as if nothing had happened there at all; he actually said: ‘And you think to find Allan at Loganlee?’

‘I haven’t a doubt of it—some tiff with Olive, no doubt.’

‘*Au revoir*, Lord Aberfeldie ! and a thousand thanks for all your kindness to me—never shall forget it, by Jove ! But I shall have the pleasure of seeing you all again in town, of course.’

To this expression of pleasure Lord Aberfeldie made no response, but shook Holcroft’s hand, whipped up his greys, and was off, thinking : ‘I am glad *he* has gone ; he looks sadly strange and queer, poor fellow.’

Holcroft was intensely relieved when the peer had left, and, making straight for the railway buffet, imbibed glass after glass of pretty potent Glenlivet, conversing affably the while with the young damsel thereat.

‘Of what are you thinking, sir, that you stare at me so ?’ she asked, with a giggle.

‘Only that your mother must have been a sweetly pretty girl !’

The train was late ; thus he had to spend some time in staring aimlessly at the flaming advertisements on the station wall—an Anglo-American fashion now spread to Scotland—advertisements of some one’s cocoa, some one’s corsets, some one’s whisky, and so forth ; and, after glancing with a contemptuous malediction at the thick Bible left by the Scottish something society in the little waiting-room, he smoked a cigar, had himself weighed, had a brandy and soda, had some more chaff with the pretty girl at the buffet, till the night train came snorting and clanking in, when he took his seat, spread his rugs, and was off, as he thought, to security at last ! Though he was not without reasonable and selfish dread for the future, as the night train sped on its swift way, and left the Carse of Gowrie far behind, he felt no genuine compunction for the atrocity he had committed. He did not possess a single spark of honour, gratitude, compunction, or compassion. By unfair play he had rooked many ; he had hocused horses ; and once

ruined a poor lad in the Lancers, on whom he contrived to cast the suspicion of his own act. The Lancer was dismissed the service by sentence of a court-martial, and shot himself next day; and Hawke Holcroft took his luxurious luncheon quietly in the same inn where the inquest was held, at the same time. He had extorted money in many ways—he had never precisely robbed—but never before had he been in the dark abyss of assassination and death till now!

The annals of our courts of justice contain many a terrible tale of guilt; but, says a novelist with truth, these would appear like nothing with the history of undiscovered and unpunished crime. ‘The assassin who accomplishes his terrible purpose so craftily as to escape detection is a cool and calculating fiend, by the side of whose supreme villany the half-premeditated crime of the ordinary shedder of blood is dwarfed into insignificance.’

So on and on sped the swift night train, and there seemed every probability that the deed of Holcroft would be one of the crimes referred to, that are neither discovered nor punished. He gave a last look into his pocket-book to assure himself that the cheque and the photo of Olive were safe, and then tried to compose himself to sleep. Let us hope that the attempt was vain! He could not help pondering over the remark of Allan about how foetid the air of the oubliette was—that the door had not been opened for an age, and no one ever thought of going near it.

CHAPTER XIX.—SUSPENSE.

LORD ABERFELDIE drove home in some alarm and dismay. Allan was *not* at Loganlee, nor had he been near it! When Ruby, the amber-haired little beauty, heard of his visit and its object, she was not slow to connect Allan’s second disappearance with some lovers’ quarrel between him and Olive, and to

gather certain jealous and pleasant hopes therefrom, for Allan was decidedly 'a weakness' of Ruby's. Uncertainty and suspense were increasing now in all their minute horror at Dundargue; while surmises proved endless, futile, and unavailing. He was gone—but where, or how, and why?

'Something has happened—something fatal—to my son!' wailed Lady Aberfeldie. 'Give me back those fatal diamonds, Eveline. They are never worn, that sorrow does not come to Dundargue!'

'Take courage, my lady,' said old Tappleton, the butler; 'ill news aye travels fast enough, and if aught was wrang wi' the Master, we should hae heard o't ere now.'

Evan Cameron, now with his regiment, and the legal agents of the family at Edinburgh were alike perplexed on the receipt of letters from Lord Aberfeldie inquiring anxiously if they knew anything of the movements of Allan, and both telegraphed back that they could give no information on the subject. With these telegrams the last hope passed away, and when the third day of his disappearance began to close a kind of horror seemed to settle over the household, and again a general and, of course, unavailing search was made through the entire neighbourhood. On the face of the servants, male and female, there was never a smile now, as they all loved Allan well; it was no assumed expression they wore; but they went about their daily work with a hushed and subdued air as if there was death in the house, and they fully felt the weight of the mystery. And ever at table stood the vacant chair, while covers were laid as usual for the absent one.

An accident must have happened; but of what nature? Lord Aberfeldie was beginning to think grimly, vaguely, and painfully of the future. If aught fatal *had* happened to Allan—his only son—an idea from which his soul shrank—his cherished title and the grand old house of Dundargue would pass to a remote cousin, one who, by long residence in Eng-

land, by intermarriage there, by training, breeding, and habit of thought, cared no more for Scotland and her interests, or for the traditions of the Grahams of Aberfeldie, than for those of Timbuctoo. Such ideas and fears had occurred to him once before, he could remember, when Allan's name appeared among the list of severely wounded in that episode of the Afghan affair which won him the Victoria Cross. To Lady Aberfeldie, such ideas, if they occurred at all, were minor indeed to the memories of Allan as the babe she had nursed in her bosom, and the curly-haired boy who had prattled at her knee, and on whom, in manhood and his prime, she had gazed with such maternal pride and admiration when she saw him with the tartan and plumed bonnet, in all the bravery of the Black Watch.

As for poor Olive and Eveline they could only weep together from time to time in all the girlish abandonment of woe. So hour by hour the silent time stole on at Dundargue. Till now Olive had never known how deeply and truly she loved Allan, of the hold his image had upon her heart; and how she had repented the pain her petulance must have cost him. Her eyes in the morning light looked weary, and yet there was an unnatural sparkle in that weariness; her rich brown hair, to the dismay of Mademoiselle Clairette, was left almost undressed, and was pushed back from her throbbing temples; her lips, though scarlet still, looked hard, dry, and cracked, while the whole expression of her face seemed changed. What was to be the clue, if ever there would be one, to this dreadful mystery!

Meanwhile it might be inquired by the reader whether Mr. Hawke Holcroft was troubled by his conscience. He certainly never betrayed any outward signs thereof—though conscience has been described as making cowards of us all—but he was not without certain reasonable and wholesome fears of dis-

covery and connection of the crime with himself. He was far away from Dundargue and all its influences. In fact, it seemed a kind of dream to him the circumstance of ever having been there at all ; and as weeks passed on nothing could exceed his perplexity and astonishment, though located in an obscure corner of London to avoid his creditors and, *pro tem.*, everyone else, to hear nothing of the affair at Dundargue or of the Master being missing. Sedulously he searched the daily prints, sedulously he watched the sensational portions of the evening third and fourth editions, but the matter was never referred to. No advertisements appeared offering rewards ; no detectives, or the usual machinery seemed to have been put in motion. What could it all mean—this silence and mystery? Everything, however trivial, finds its way into print now, and the son of a peer—and an officer in Her Majesty's service, too—does not vanish every day ! At last he got a shock, when a poster proclaimed in large capitals, '*The mysterious outrage at Dun—*' but his sight failed him for a moment, and when again he looked he perceived that it was not Dundargue, but '*Dunecht,*' that was mentioned with reference to the affair of a past time. But in all this we are somewhat anticipating.

CHAPTER XX.—THE OUBLIETTE.

IN these unromantic, plodding, prosaic days of railways, telegraphs, and telephones, who would imagine that the fine old family mansion of Dundargue would be the scene of a crime—of a tragedy—suited only to the days of the Sir Malise Graham of the fourteenth century? Yet so it was. Allan was not killed—he was perhaps one of those fellows who are not easily killed—but he was severely injured by the fall and concussion, and it was long before he began to struggle back into a consciousness of existence, as he had fallen partly on his head and

left shoulder. The former had suffered from that circumstance and from the dreadful blow dealt him by Hawke Holcroft ; and he was not slow in discovering that his left arm was useless—broken above the elbow.

‘Thank Heaven, it is not my sword arm!’ he whispered, huskily, as he strove to stagger up, but only to sink helplessly down again on the cold stone floor of his prison.

He was too weak—too confused to feel either just rage or indignation yet. There was a horrible dream-like sense of utter unreality in the whole situation in which he so suddenly found himself, and some time elapsed before the whole episode with Holcroft—his unfortunate offer to show him this fatal place, the situation and character of which had suddenly suggested the crime—their idling in the picture-gallery, smoking and wandering through corridors, up and down ancient stairs, with eventually a sudden recollection of the whole adventure—surged into his brain, and a gasp of rage escaped him.

‘Accursed coward and villain!’ muttered Allan, looking upward ; but all was darkness there and around him.

The hours stole on. He staggered up, and at last began to explore the place in which he found himself—a somewhat needless act, as he knew it but too well, having many a time, when a boy, with fear, awe, and curiosity, lowered down a candle at the end of a string, and seen it swaying to and fro far down below till the damp vapour extinguished the flame. Yet he felt with his right hand the circular wall of massive masonry which enclosed him, carefully again and again, in the desperate hope of finding some outlet, though he knew well by the history and traditions of the place that no such thing could ever have existed ; but he could not remain still or withstand the nervous desire for exertion—to be up and doing something ; till again he sank on the floor in utter weariness of heart, albeit that heart was aflame with rage. He uttered

shouts for help from time to time, till his voice became hoarse and began to fail him, and his spirit too, as he knew the enormous thickness of the old walls around him ; and tears of rage almost escaped him as he pondered over the cold and calculating villany of which he was now so mysteriously the helpless victim. He had no doubt that the hours of the night were now stealing on, and that long ere this his absence must have been discovered, and speculation would be rife. He had his watch, but he was in utter and blackest darkness, and his box of cigar-lights having dropped from his pocket he had no means of consulting the dial. He could but lie there in great pain and passive misery—a misery that seemed so unnatural that it was like a nightmare, an unreality that must pass away as suddenly as it had come upon him. How terrible and indescribable, however, grew his aching thoughts as the weary time went on ! He might die of cold, of hunger, of agony—die within a few yards of his own hearthstone—die thus under his father's roof, and close by where at that very moment the whole family were a prey to bewilderment and distress by his sudden disappearance !

Oh, it was all too maddening to think of. So there he could but lie, buried, immured, entombed in darkness ; chill as death, not a breath of pure air in his nostrils ; not the faintest glimmer of light, and no human sound in his ears. As the hours crept on he could scarcely distinguish waking from sleeping, a dream from reality ; and at times all seemed to become chaos, and he could think of nothing unless it were a buzzing in his head and the acute agony of his broken arm. Anon he would utter a feeble shout for 'help,' but his own voice seemed to return to him ; beyond the walls that enclosed him it would not go. He knew that there are situations in life incident to misery and painful excitement, when the human machinery by the rapidity of mental action is worn out sooner than its allotted time, and he began to consider how long it was

possible to exist without food or water. Wearily, agonizingly the hours dragged on. By this time he was certain that night had passed and day had come again ; and what must the thoughts of his people be ? Inquiries and searches would be made he knew, but who would ever dream of searching for him where he was *then* ? He had not yet begun to suffer from hunger, but he had a considerable thirst, and hunger would come too. He thought of all he had read of the endurance of men on rafts and in open boats at sea ; of entombed miners buried deep in the bowels of the earth, and his hair seemed to bristle up at the recollections. Hunger, thirst, and an unknown death—or death at such craven hands !

‘ Oh, God,’ he moaned, ‘ will aid never—never come ?’

In that gruesome place and time there occurred to him—ghastly memory !—thoughts of the unknown and forgotten dead whose matted bones had been found in it by antiquarian explorers, as he had mentioned to Holcroft—the remains of unfortunate creatures flung in there by his forefathers. Could it be that this unlooked-for fate of his was to be a species of expiation for them ? And was he to die now by this death, when life had become to him so much dearer than ever ? If his disappearance remained utterly unaccounted for, and his death became—as of course it would be—a thing of the past, and forgotten even by those to whom he was dear, might not Hawke Holcroft regain such influence as he had ever possessed over Olive and make her his own ? She would be free then ; there would be no obstacle, and no other rendering of the will necessary, now that he was removed. Never again to see her face or the faces of those he loved and who loved him so ; to die a rat’s death, within arm’s length of them almost ! Could his ancestor have foreseen, when he formed this infernal trap, that one of his own race was to perish therein, and thus !

After a time, amid all this tangle of terrible thoughts, he began to forget where he was ; his senses partly left him ; he

believed himself to be with the regiment—the Black Watch, with their dark tartans and historic crimson plumes ; he heard the crash of the drums, the braying of the pipes, and saw many familiar faces around him, those of Cameron and Carslogie among others. Now the regiment was going into action ; he saw the line forming, the eyes of the men lighting grimly up as they loaded, and the sunshine flashed upon the ridges of levelled steel. The dream seemed a palpable one, and, with a shout louder than he thought he could utter, he called upon them to follow him in the charge ! His own cry awoke or aroused him ; the glorious vision of the charging line melted into opaque darkness, and now Allan found himself weaker than ever. He thought all was nearly over with him now. He turned his thoughts to prayer, ere it might be too late, and, from pondering on release and vengeance and the things of this life, he began to think, as his powers ebbed, of the life to come. He felt that he must resign himself to the inevitable, and to die—to die there after all, and at last he became totally insensible.

CHAPTER XXI.—CEAD MILLE MALOCH !

THE shout uttered by Allan in his delirium had not been uttered in vain. It chanced that Mr. Tappleton, the silver-haired old butler, who had been custodier of the wine-bins and the massive old plate in its iron-bound chest since the present Lord Aberfeldie was a baby in long clothes, had entered his dusty and cobwebbed repositories, and was seeking through their stone shelves for some fine old crusted port of a peculiar vintage, kept alone for the use of his master and himself, when the cry of Allan and some other strange sounds reached his ears, as he thought, and seriously startled him. We say he thought, for the recess of his wine-bins was an unlikely place to hear any other sound than that made by a scared rat. It

was now the dead, dull silence of midnight, when the sounds that are unknown amid the buzz of mid-day life are heard, and seem so oddly, so preternaturally loud and strange—a crack in a door panel or wainscot, the tap of a moth against the window-panes, distant noises that come we know not how or from what on the still damp air. In a country house at night there is usually a solemn stillness that is painful and oppressive to the wakeful; and it was amidst this silence, the cry—for a human cry it was—reached the butler's startled ear.

But whence had it come? Out of the stone wall, or from the ground beneath, or from the throat of a raven in one of the great chimneys of the old house?

'Impossible!' thought Tappleton; 'it was the voice of a man—or a ghost.'

At the latter idea he closed the wine-bin door, and retired with precipitation to his cosy room, and thought the matter over as he stirred and sipped his hot whisky toddy, but feeling ever and anon that wild throbbing of the heart, and 'that electric chill and rising of the hair, which accompanies supernatural panic.'

The old man had a most uncomfortable feeling about the voice he had heard, and its strangely muffled sound seemed to come in fancy to his ear again and again; and now he, not unnaturally, began to associate it with the mysterious disappearance of Allan, the Master.

With earliest dawn he betook himself to his wine cellar again, and felt that he was a bolder man in daylight than in the gloom of midnight; but 'most men are,' says Charles Dickens; yet when an unmistakable moan or two reached his ears, his fear of the supernatural so nearly gained the ascendancy that he was about to take to flight again. However he paused, while his old heart beat painfully, and began to think of what adjoined his cellars, and at once there flashed upon his memory the locality of the horrible old vault; for the butler knew all the

'outs and ins' of Dundargue as well as if he had built it. In the course of modern alterations and repairs, a portion of the originally enormous wall of the vault had been thinned and cut away. There were crannies in the masonry, and it was through these the voice of the imprisoned had reached the butler during his casual visit to his cellar.

'Some one is there. Good Heavens! if it should be the Master—the Master after a'!' exclaimed Tappleton; and, quick as his old legs could carry him, he rushed upstairs, through the picture-gallery, along the arched corridor, and reached at last the oak trap-door; but when he saw it, with its great iron hasp over the rusted staple, hope died away, and his soul sank within him.

Loth to linger in a place where, as we have stated, superstition believed that those who did so had a creeping sense of having near them shadowy forms and intangible presences, he was on the point of turning away, when, controlling his silly fears, he thought he might as well pursue his investigations further. He raised the trap-door, and almost immediately a voice ascended to his ear from the darkness below. He peered down, but could see nothing.

'Wha is there—wha spoke?' asked the butler.

'I—I, the Master,' replied the weak voice of Allan Graham.

'You, sir—heavens be gude tae us! You, sir! hoo in God's name cam' ye to be doon there?' cried Tappleton, in mingled joy, horror, and great perplexity.

'Summon help—there's a good old fellow; get me out, and then you will know all—quick, Tappleton, or—or I shall not last much longer,' replied Allan faintly, and at intervals, in a voice so low that his last words seemed to die away, while Tappleton rushed off as fast as his years would permit, to seek Lord Aberfeldie and alarm the whole household, which he did very effectually by a sudden and furious application to the great house-bell, causing a very general idea of fire, and bringing all

from their rooms in various kinds of *déshabille* at that early hour of the morning.

‘The Master’s found—the Master’s found!’ he kept shouting on every hand.

‘Where—where?’ asked twenty voices.

‘Ay, ye may weel ask *whar*,’ was the tantalizing response.

In the breast of Lord Aberfeldie and all his household incredulity at first, and then profound astonishment, reigned for a time on the butler making himself understood, and all hastened to the scene of his discovery.

‘The Master—the Master down *there*!’ muttered the servants, looking inquiringly in each other’s faces. ‘How came such a thing to pass?’

They jostled and impeded each other; but Lord Aberfeldie’s authority and soldier-like promptitude soon defined a line of action.

‘Lights—lights and ropes; look alive, men!’ he exclaimed.

These requisites were soon brought.

‘Lower away—take courage—we’ll soon have you out,’ exclaimed his father. ‘Tie the ropes tightly round you.’

Allan, in a faint voice, made them aware that this was impossible, as his left arm was broken, tidings which added commiseration and grief to the blank amazement of Olive, Eveline, and his mother.

‘Who will go down?’ asked Lord Aberfeldie, looking around him.

‘I—and I—and I!’

Every man in the house was ready to descend; but Angus Glas, the young active deerstalker, slid down the rope with a lantern in his hand, followed by the prayer of Olive, who would not be kept back, her eyes wild, her now pale lips apart, her sweet face blanched, and a strange stiffness in all her usually lithe limbs. Pale as death, his face plastered with dried blood—blood that had flowed from a contusion in his

head—livid and helpless, his left arm hanging limp as an empty sleeve by his side, his eyes half closed, as if unable to endure the glare of the day after being so long in the dark, Allan was brought up, and, on beholding him, the exclamations of commiseration and astonishment redoubled ; and yet it could be seen that he was almost past questioning, and mounted grooms were instantly despatched to summon all the medical aid of the district.

Had the butler's nocturnal visit to his bins been twenty-four hours later, Allan Graham must have perished, and his fate might never have been known in his own generation perhaps. The whole catastrophe seemed so strange, unintelligible, unnatural, and harrowing that the nerves of Lady Aberfeldie were terribly shaken by it ; so were those of her daughter and Olive, and each needed all the comfort and support the other could give. Some wine, which he drank thirstily, first revived the patient after he was conveyed to his room.

‘How in the name of heaven, Allan, came you to fall into that place?’ asked his father.

‘I did not fall in,’ replied Allan, in a species of husky whisper.

‘How then?’

‘Holcroft!’ was all Allan could utter, when the room seemed to swim round him, and he became insensible.

Lord Aberfeldie knew not precisely what to make of the reply, but suspicion gave him a certain clue to what he thought had happened, and the same idea seemed to occur to young Angus, the gillie, who was assisting to undress his master and put him to bed, for his eyes gleamed under their shaggy brows, and he could only mutter from time to time, ‘*Cead mille maloch!*’—a malediction in which Lord Aberfeldie heartily concurred.

When ultimately the Peer learned all that had transpired, the incident of the cheque he had so innocently and generously given Holcroft was completely forgotten. He felt only rage,

mingled with utter stupefaction, that a man could act so basely as his recent guest had done. It was altogether out of his calculation and experience of human life in every way.

‘But what is to be done now—to search out and punish this malignant scoundrel!’ he exclaimed; while Lady Aberfeldie, all her motherly feelings outraged, was for raising fire and sword, and letting loose all the terrors of the law on Holcroft’s head.

Lord Aberfeldie, however, after a time thought differently. He had a horror of publicity, of newspaper gossip and scandals, of making his honoured and ancestral home and the affairs of his family a *point d’appui*, as he said, for such things—a world’s wonder, even for a time; and thus he declined to attempt to punish Holcroft for an outrage none had seen him commit. He would leave that to the course of events, and to Time, the avenger. More than all, the name of Olive Raymond might crop up in the unseemly matter.

‘His father was a brave, good fellow, and my dearest friend!’ said Lord Aberfeldie sadly; ‘how comes his son to be such an utter villain? He has drawn his evil tendencies from some past generation; it is said that such a kind of poison is at times transmitted in the blood, and that no human being can truly value the resistance of sin or folly.’

But Lady Aberfeldie was stormy, and declined to be pacified.

‘We have the future to think of,’ said her husband again; ‘evil tongues to guard against for the sake of Olive, our whole family, and my old comrade the General, who is now in his grave—the father of that foul ingrate.’

Thus it was that no mention of the affair was made by the daily prints, to the surprise, certainly, and perhaps the relief of Holcroft’s mind.

‘Say no more on this subject, Eveline,’ said Lord Aberfeldie, as he sought to soothe his wife. ‘Gladly would I forget that we had ever sheltered at Dundargue a guest so degrading in character; gladly would I forget as soon as possible—if it be

possible—the hours of intense suffering we have undergone, more than all that Allan must have undergone in that horrible place, and yet under his own roof!’

Many a silent and reproachful tear Olive shed in secret, as she knew, in the recent past time, how much her pride, petulance, and suspicion had done to further jealousy and resentment in the mind of Holcroft against her cousin; and she felt that too probably she had caused all this.

But Holcroft was a bankrupt and a blackleg now, and never more, at London or anywhere else, she thought, could he cross *her* path again. Till now she never believed that the world could contain a man so utterly unprincipled, so thoroughly base! The household servants supposed that the Master had fallen into that gruesome vault by accident, and they were allowed to adopt the idea.

‘But *who* closed the trap and dropped the hasp over the staple?’ thought Old Tappleton; yet eventually he allowed himself to be talked into the idea that he had made a mistake in that matter.

Allan lay long ill and delirious after all he had undergone; but when it was announced that he was past danger, great was the rejoicing of all the servants and the household at Dundargue, for all loved the Master well, and were faithfully attached to the family by ties of residence and clanship, even in this Victorian age. ‘The devoted loyalty of the clansmen to their chiefs existed undiminished for generations after the system of clan government was abolished in 1746,’ said the *Standard* newspaper recently; ‘and it would be wholly erroneous to contend, *even now*, that the peculiar affection between the people and their chief, altogether different in nature and degree from any relationship known in a Saxon community, has died away.’

But the family of Aberfeldie had *not* seen the last of Mr. Hawke Holcroft,

CHAPTER XXII.—LOVERS.

THE early days of the spring subsequent to the events we have narrated found the Aberfeldie family located at Maviswood, a handsome modern villa to the west of Edinburgh, whither they had removed from Dundargue, that Allan, on whom a kind of protracted illness had fallen, might avail himself of the great medical skill which is always to be found in the Scottish metropolis. By what means Allan was discovered and got out of the vault into which he had been flung, and, as Hawke Holcroft hoped, was entombed for ever, the latter never knew, from the plan adopted by the family, but the public prints had informed him more than once, that ‘the Master of Aberfeldie had met with an accident—a fall—from the effects of which he was slowly recovering; wounds received when on service with the Black Watch retarding his progress to health.’

Evan Cameron, Carslogie, and others of the regiment, then in the Castle of Edinburgh, heard of Allan’s affair or illness in a vague way, as Lord Aberfeldie shrank from all gossip, publicity and surmise; and the first named learned that Eveline’s marriage had been delayed in consequence of that illness, chiefly through a letter written to him by Olive, at Allan’s request. So the early days of spring were passing on, and no particular change had taken place in the relative positions of our characters since we last saw them at Dundargue. Eveline was alone one afternoon in a room at Maviswood—a room of vast proportions. The ceiling was divided into deep panels of oak colour; a dado of dead gold tint was carried round the walls to within eight feet of the cornice, and the chairs and ottomans were upholstered in blue maroquin leather, studded with elaborate gilt nails. The hangings were blue, with yellow borders, lining and tassels; great china bowls, full of conservatory flowers, stood on ornate tables and pedestals, within the recess of a great triple bay window, beyond

which spread away southward the lovely landscape that is bounded by the Pentlands. Spring is a lovely and joyous season everywhere, but nowhere is it lovelier than in the fertile Lothians; and nowhere may the eye rest upon a more varied and beautiful landscape than that which spreads from the southern slope of Corstorphine's wooded crags to the base of the green and undulating Pentlands, the highest summits of which range from sixteen hundred to nearly nineteen hundred feet.

There are corn-fields teeming with fertility, rows of stately trees, pretty cottages, stately white manor houses, and cosy farms embosomed among old woods and orchards; the picturesque rocks of wooded Craiglockhart, wherein the kites and kestrels build their nests; the rich alluvial land, where for ages a great loch once spread its waters; the quaint old village church, on the spire of which the red sunset loves to linger; and westward the Queen of the North, in all the glory of castled rock, and hill and crag, spire, tower and countless terraces; and on all of these the wistful eyes of Eveline Graham were wandering dreamily. A golden glory was cast along the eastern slopes; the fleecy clouds were every moment assuming new forms and lovelier colours; the woods were budding forth; the Leith and its tiny tributaries were brawling along as if their waters had no time to toy with the brown pebbles. Seated, at times, sideways on their horses, the happy ploughboys were already going home from their labours. The early-yearned lambs were frisking about the ewes, and cloud and sunshine seemed to chase each other over the tender grass, where the wild white gowan was opening its petals, and old folks were remembering that 'a peck o' March dust was worth the ransom o' a king.'

Of late, Eveline's bursts of girlish merriment had been few and far between. She was fretful—unusually so for a girl who by nature was so sweet and gentle, and at the mere mention of

the name of Sir Paget—to whom she felt herself doomed, as it were, or allotted—she became more fretful, silent, and abstracted. She shrank from smiling people, turned her back upon inquisitive ones, and often was found to answer briefly and beside the point. In short, the pretty Eveline's heart or mind was quite unhinged. The tenth day of her residence at Maviswood was creeping slowly on, and she was pondering, full of thought, alone in that stately room, when a servant startled her by announcing and ushering in 'Mr. Evan Cameron,' and, though her mind was full of him—of the evening of the carpet-dance at Dundargue, and the hour of joy in the half-lit corridor, a kind of gasp escaped her as she rose from her seat to receive him. But why should he *not* call, reason suggested to her. The Grahams had been for ten days, we have said, at Maviswood; and Cameron, who had been counting every hour of those ten days, and watching the villa with his field-glass from his quarters in the distant castle, had now ventured to make an afternoon walk, and found, beyond his hopes, that Eveline was alone.

Allan and Olive were out together in a pony-phaeton; Lord and Lady Aberfeldie were he cared not where; anyway they were absent too. Olive, feeling that she was in some way responsible, by her past thoughtlessness, petulance, and flirting with the daring and unworthy Holcroft, for much that had befallen Allan, now 'waited on him hand and foot,' as the old nurse Nannie phrased it. She was with him from hour to hour, and, though their marriage was delayed, how happy they seemed to be! Fearing interruption as before, Cameron, too tender and true not to be a timid lover, found a difficulty just then in taking up the thread of the old story, and they stood in the bay-window talking commonplaces, while heart was speaking to heart and eye to eye. But 'what is speaking or hearing when heart wells into heart?'

Cameron heard all she chose then to tell him about Allan's

'accident,' the bewilderment and alarm of the family, and so forth. Many friends were spoken of, but Sir Paget was of course referred to by neither. Eveline, though so young, had the frank and perfect air of repose in her manner that came of gentle breeding, and made her seem older than she was, but gave an assurance that whatever she said, or whatever she did, was said and done in the right way. Without coquetry, her manner was full of simple fascination; but it was undeniably nervous now, for she read by Cameron's softened voice, and in his brightening eye, the clear necessity for something else than common-place talk, when he discovered by a casual remark that Lord and Lady Abersfeldie were not in the house.

Eveline felt that she had given herself to Evan, and that the tenor of their interview in the corridor amounted tacitly to an engagement. An engagement! But to what end? It all seemed but a dream, a delicious dream, of which there was nothing to remind her, not even a ring, a lock of hair, or the tiniest note. Unlike Cameron, Eveline, while loving him dearly, had, singular to say, no thought of marriage with him in the ordinary sense of the word; for, hemmed round as she was, and *destined* as she was, the idea was a hopeless one, judged from her parents' point of view. She only felt, poor girl, that she loved, and was full of sad joy—if we may use the paradox—in the belief that she was truly loved in return.

'How silent you have become,' she said, in a low tone, after a nervous pause.

'I know not what to say; but love has no need of words, Eveline, nor needs he many at any time,' he replied, drawing closer to her. Then he took a conservatory rose from a vase, and exclaimed, 'Eveline darling, you love me well and truly, don't you?'

'Well and truly, you know, dear Evan,' she replied, as his arm went round her, and her head dropped on his shoulder. 'What need to ask me?' she whispered, in a breathless voice.

‘Because I cannot hear the beloved assurance too often.’ He kissed her tenderly, we cannot say how many times, nor would it matter, while she lay passive in his arms, and then he said, ‘Shall we try our fate with this rose?’

‘How?’

‘By plucking it, leaf by leaf, saying each time “Lucky, Unlucky,” till the last leaf comes.’

‘Something *à la Marguerite*.

‘Yes.’

‘No, decidedly no, dearest Evan.’

‘You are superstitious. Well, so am I.’

‘Thus an omen would only torment us, and surely we have enough—enough——’ Tears choked her voice, and she could only add, ‘Trust, dearest Evan, trust.’

‘In what, my darling?’

‘The great goodness of God.’

The spell of a great love was on both. Their lips met in a long and silent kiss, and the rose fell at their feet between them. A sound roused them—nay, startled them. They had only time to separate and affect a sudden interest in the artistic effects produced by light and shadow on the landscape, when Lord and Lady Aberfeldie entered the room together, a pretty palpable cloud of annoyance resting on the brows of both as they politely, but far from warmly, greeted the visitor.

The peer, who had evidently been out riding, appeared in a black morning coat and white cords, whip in hand, and the lady, who had been in the grounds, wore her garden hat and shawl. She had seen a visitor ride up to the door from a distant part of the lawn, and had hurried home, her heart foreboding truly *who* that visitor was. And now, while their hearts were vibrating with tenderness, and with their lips yet tremulously sensible of the sweetness of kisses—the first kisses of a new and early love—they had to talk enforced commonplace—or, at least, Evan did so, while Eveline remained silent—of the

news of the day, the expected plans of the Ministry, the probable despatch of a fleet to Egyptian waters, of the chances of an army following it, of Arabi Pasha and the Khedive, the plot formed by the Circassian officers, and so forth, till it was time for the lingering Cameron to resume his hat and depart at last. Cameron tried to ignore that which, under other and more prosperous circumstances, would have galled and roused his haughty Highland spirit—Lord Aberfeldie's coldness of manner when he spoke even of the regiment, and how certainly it would go to the East, 'as the Black Watch, thank God, was always in everything, and always with honour,' while Evan's eyes irresistibly wandered to the face of Eveline, and memory went back to the twilighted corridor at Dundargue. But so did the memory of my Lord Aberfeldie.

The peer must have undergone a good deal of training or 'drilling' lately at the hands of Lady Aberfeldie before he could have brought himself to behave so coldly to one he really liked so well as young Stratherroch, and one of the Black Watch especially; but then, perhaps, he was just a little soured by the sequel to the hospitality and kindness accorded to 'the son of his old friend,' which son had contrived by skilful lettering and figuring to add the sum of eighty pounds to his cheque. As he bade them adieu Stratherroch observed that Lord Aberfeldie did *not* ask him to call again at Maviswood, and keenly did he feel the omission and *all* it implied, and with it came the conviction that he must call no more! Slowly he rode back to his quarters, full of alternately exultant and bitter thoughts—exultant that Eveline loved him and would never cease to love him, but bitter ones as he asked himself, to what end? If poor Cameron had vague and lingering hopes to which he clung (and doubtless he had)—hopes, when seeing Eveline, of proposing or hinting of meeting elsewhere in the future—they were doomed to blight, for no such bore fruition; and they had now parted, and her father and mother

thought they should part, as mere friends, who might meet casually in society, but at all events had better *not* meet again. And Cameron feared that, so far as monetary matters stood with him, his friend Allan might endorse the same view of the situation.

‘Stratherroch is a gentleman by birth and position, but poor, miserably poor,’ said Lady Aberfeldie, after he had gone; ‘so was that precious Mr. Holcroft, and when a declension takes place in tone, manner, and habits, as in his instance, we never know where it may end,’ she added pointedly to Eveline.

‘How can you speak of the two men in the same sentence!’ exclaimed the peer, with an asperity for which his daughter thanked him in her aching heart.

At any time when Eveline looked south-eastward from Maviswood she could see the Castle of Edinburgh, and the towering mass of the western barrack, with all its windows shining in the sun, and she always did so with tenderest interest, as she knew that *he* was there; but, natheless her experience of at least one London season, there was much of the guileless child and mere girl in Eveline still, and she was so sweet and soft, so pliable, and so impressed with her mother’s will and her father’s authority, that—that how could Evan Cameron tell what pressure might be brought to bear upon her, to make her seem to transfer the allegiance of her heart to another—even to the wealthy old English baronet, Sir Paget Puddicombe? Alas! there was to be, in time, a pressure that none could then foresee.

CHAPTER XXIII.—AT MAVISWOOD.

THE reports which Mr. Hawke Holcroft—spinning out his precarious existence by skill with the billiard-cue, cards, and the betting-ring—heard concerning the health of his intended victim, one whom he still absurdly and grotesquely deemed his

successful rival, were undoubtedly true. With all his natural strength, Allan Graham recovered but slowly from all he had undergone, and the many hours he had lingered in that vault with his fractured limb unset, together with the effect of certain sabre wounds received when he served in India, retarded his progress to restoration ; but amid his protracted convalescence how sweet it was, as the pleasant days of sunny spring stole on at Maviswood, to have the society, the hourly care and attendance, of Olive, in whom he was always, he thought, discovering some new charm of mind or grace of manner, with much soft tenderness of heart and hand. Thus, twice—once in India and again at home—rescued, as it were, from the verge of death, he had learned the sweetness of life, and that, whatever its sufferings and sorrows may be, what a priceless gift it is—a reflection that never occurred to him when going under fire, or leading a line of Highlanders in their headlong charge.

Lady Aberfeldie was content and happy ; Evan Cameron seemed now a banished man ; even Allan never spoke of him, and the progress of matters between the cousins proved all she could desire.

‘Nothing could be more fortunate, dearest Olive, than the attachment which now subsists between you and Allan ; it fulfils all your father’s fondest wishes,’ said she, as she met them one day in the garden, slowly promenading between the flower-beds, Allan leaning, or affecting to do so, on the soft, round arm of Olive.

‘Yes, mother dear—I agree with you, and also with Peter Simple,’ replied Allan, smiling.

‘In what ?’

‘That the life of a man seems to consist of getting into scrapes, and then getting out of them again.’

‘And you forget now that I ever teased and tormented you so, my poor Allan ?’ said Olive, patting his rather pale cheek with her pinky palm.

‘Of course I do, darling. I am not much of a philosopher, but Balzac is right in his view of human life—that it would be intolerable without a vast amount of forgetting.’

‘And forgiving, too, he might have added,’ said Olive, as she tendered her lips playfully and poutingly for a kiss, which he was not slow in according.

Poor Eveline, as she watched this happy pair daily under her eyes, sighed with natural and irrepressible envy; she thought of her own love for Evan Cameron—secret, ignored, and so liable to excite maternal scorn and bitterness, with paternal reprehension, when it came on the tapis; while even Allan, at all times so loving and so brotherly, amid the great selfishness or absorption of his own passion, seemed, as she thought, to have withdrawn his sympathy from her now.

One circumstance she deemed most fortunate—Parliament was sitting, and Sir Paget Puddicombe was in London. It would seem, then, that between the botheration of Ireland and the interests of Egypt, the affairs of Slough-cum-Sloggit—monetary, municipal, and commercial—were as likely to be forgotten and ignored as if that quiet borough had actually been an integral part of Scotland—a state of matters not to be tolerated. So Sir Paget was in his place at Westminster, jerking his head and puffing out his chest more than ever, and Eveline was freed for a time from his presence, and the would-be lover-like regard of his suspicious and keenly critical old eyes. And she knew not that almost daily, the moment that he was free from duty, or parade was over, Evan, drawn by an irrepressible craving and desire to be near her—to see the roof under which she dwelt, the windows through which she might be looking, the trees under which she might be walking—was always hovering in the vicinity of Maviswood; while, by a strange fatality, she, filled by a similar desire, might be riding with her father, or driving with her mother, through stately George Street, along the magnificent terrace of Princes Street, and other great

thoroughfares, looking eagerly, but in vain, for a chance glimpse of him, and perhaps a bow—a mere bow, and nothing more. Circumstanced as they were, what more could she look for?

Twice only, and at long intervals, did she see Evan, and on each occasion how wildly did her loving heart beat as she detected his well-known figure; but he saw not her, as she rode slowly on by her father's side, who, if he saw Evan on the first occasion, steadily ignored the fact, and stared up at the Castle ramparts, where the sentinels of the Black Watch trod slowly to and fro. Certainly Evan did not see her. He was on the garden-side of Princes Street—the wooded walk which somewhat resembles a Continental boulevard—in close conversation with a young lady, who seemed to listen to all he was saying with great *empressement*. The second time she saw him was after an interval of some days, in the same place, at the same hour, and with the same fair companion, to whom her father—thinking, no doubt, to utilize the circumstance—drew her attention somewhat pointedly.

‘Cameron *again*!’ said he; ‘our friend seems to find other attractions in the gardens than trees or spring flowers.’

Eveline's heart beat painfully, and the second episode gave her occasion for much and rather harassing thought. Her father, by this remark, showed that he had observed Evan before; but *who* was the latter's companion? Eveline blushed violently up to where the brim of her smart riding-hat pressed her bright brown hair upon her brow, and down to where a stiff and snow-white linen collar encircled her slender white neck; then she grew very pale with constrained emotion, which, fortunately, her father did not detect. She did not speak, but pretended to smile, with an effort of self-mastery, while a lump seemed to rise in her slender throat; for though the circumstance of Evan, who was debarred from coming to see her, being seen there again with the same young lady might be a casualty, a trivial coincidence, and quite explainable, her pride was piqued and her affection wounded.

Still more were they piqued and wounded when, some days after, as she was seated in the carriage at the door of a shop in which Lady Aberfeldie was giving some orders, she saw this girl loitering in the same spot, looking anxiously around her, as if waiting for some one who did not come, and whom Eveline's heart foreboded could only be Evan Cameron. She snatched from the carriage-basket or reticule a lorgnette, through which she could see that the girl was more than pretty, very pale, and, though plainly yet fashionable dressed, with an undoubtedly lady-like air and bearing. If he was Evan she waited for, he did not keep his appointment, for, after a time, the stranger turned sadly, lingeringly away, and disappeared.

A dancing-man, a popular young fellow like Evan Cameron, in one of the most popular of Scottish regiments, could not fail to have many lady friends in Edinburgh; but to have been seen twice in the same place, with the same girl, at the same time, and apparently expected there a *third* time, was a little peculiar, and apt to cause Eveline to speculate upon it unpleasantly. Was this companionship a matter of daily occurrence? Or was he, amid the enforced separation from herself, beginning to replace her image by another already—already? The tenderness of their last meeting, in the bay-window at Maviswood, seemed to preclude this cruel idea, and to the hope that tenderness inspired she clung most lovingly; thus, as yet, she did not speak of the matter to her cousin Olive, who—full of her own love-affair and her new-found happiness—might not have sympathized with her as once she would have done; and, to add to her trouble, in a little time she would have her old admirer beside her again, as the member for Slough-cum-Sloggit was making arrangements to pair off with another, and would soon be able to leave London.

However, some happiness was in store for her still. Cameron, to do him justice, spent too much of his spare time in hovering about the vicinity of Maviswood not to be rewarded. Thus,

one clear, bright afternoon, in a lovely and lonely green lane, where the holly hedges grew close and darkly, where the wood-violets spread their velvet leaves on the sunny banks, and where the mavis and merle sang, they suddenly met each other, as he came walking slowly along on foot, leading his horse by the bridle, which was flung over his arm. His heart was so full of her that, when he met her suddenly face to face thus, he scarcely evinced surprise, while tremulously she put both her hands into his.

‘Evan!’

‘My darling—at last—at last!’

No eye was upon them there as his arms went round her, and in the great joy of seeing him, of meeting him thus, the two occasions on which she had seen him with another, promenading slowly under the trees in Princes Street, were forgotten and committed to oblivion; though ere long they were to be roughly brought to her memory.

‘Oh, Evan—such long looked for—such unexpected joy!’ she exclaimed, as hand in hand they gazed into each other’s eyes.

‘Joy indeed, my own one. I had begun to fear we might never meet again; and I shall not leave you now but with the assurance that we shall meet as often as we can till—till——’

‘When, Evan?’

‘The regiment marches—marches for the East, as it is sure to do before long. Eveline, you must be out in the garden, in the grounds often; can I not meet you there or here again?’

She shook her head sadly, and looked at him lovingly and imploringly.

‘The meetings in secret—without permission—would be wrong, Evan,’ said she.

‘Permission—who will give it? Whom—what have we to consult but our own hearts?’ he continued passionately. ‘We may have but little time—less than we reckon on now—for the

interchange of love and joy, my dear one ; and meet me you shall—you *must*,' he added, as he folded her to his breast and covered her sweet passive face with kisses, while something of hostility and defiance at her whole family and at Sir Paget welled up in his heart. 'You will meet me again?' he urged.

'Yes,' she replied, in a scarcely audible whisper.

It could be no sin, no crime—if an error—to meet one who loved her so well as Evan did, and whom she loved so dearly too. It could not harm her elderly adorer, from whose image just then she shrank with intense loathing ; and if it was a wrong against her parents, surely they were in error to coerce her, she thought. On the other hand, the temptation was great ; the joy of meeting Evan would end sadly and bitterly when, as he said, the regiment departed, and after that they might never see each other more !

'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant,' say the Scriptures ; and not less sweet and pleasant were the interviews that might be stolen thus in a green and lonely lane.

'God help me and direct me!' thought the girl, as she nestled her face in Cameron's neck, and, yielding to the natural impulses of her own heart, promised to meet him again and again, when time and opportunity served ; and they did so in the lane between the holly hedges, by the rural woodland road that, deep between the hills, leads to Ravelston Quarry and haunted Craigcrook ; and at times near the old church, where the buried Forresters lie under their altar-tombs with shield on arm and sword at side ; and as the days went on each meeting—as it seemed to take place without suspicion or discovery—served to cement their hearts together more and more.

But once, when Evan was riding home in the dusk in the vicinity of Maviswood, he passed a wayfarer afoot, in whose face he thought he recognised—nay, was certain he saw—the features of Holcroft.

‘Holcroft!’ thought Evan; ‘a man to guard against, by Jove! What can *he* be about in this neighbourhood—what but mischief?’

He wheeled his horse round, but the man he had seen had stepped over a stile and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.—‘ALICE!’

My Lady Aberfeldie was all unconscious of the little romance that had been going on for some weeks past in the green lanes and wooded paths near Maviswood; while Eveline seemed now but to live for the purpose of meeting Evan Cameron, and her loving heart and busy little head were full of cunning schemes and contrivances to escape detection and achieve their meetings, which now seemed to make the whole sense of her existence; and when *not* with Evan, or if they failed (which was seldom) to see each other, even for a few minutes, her manner became abstracted and *triste*. But a rude awakening from her joyous dreams was at hand, and certain past events that seemed trivial in themselves were doomed to be recalled to her with a new and terrible significance. They had one more than usually tender meeting and tender parting because Sir Paget Puddicombe—the *bête noire*, the bugbear of both—was certainly coming to Maviswood; and Eveline was weeping bitterly.

‘Take courage—take courage, my darling,’ said Evan, as he kissed the tears from her eyes and strained her to his breast before he leaped on his horse; ‘for my sake and your own, have strength to resist, and all may yet be well—for my sake and your own, dearest Alice,’ he added, with quivering lips, and was gone.

‘Alice!’

Another’s name uttered by his lips involuntarily while his heart seemed to be teeming with tenderness for herself—uttered

in that moment of supreme sorrow, passion, and endearment—escaped him mechanically, as it were, yet too evidently by use and wont! What did it mean—what could it mean, but one thing? Her heart stood still for a moment and then beat wildly; she did not hear the noise of his horse's hoofs dying away in the distance, nor did she see his lessening figure, for the powers of hearing and of vision seemed to fail her. She had received a cruel and terrible shock. Had she heard aright, or was it all a delusion of her ear? yet she repeated to herself with pallid face and quivering lips the word 'Alice!' while memory flashed back to the girl she had seen thrice—twice with Evan and once evidently waiting for him at what seemed their trysting-place. She remembered that the second time she had seen them they were walking silently together—full of their own thoughts apparently—and making no effort to entertain each other, and she had read that it is only 'the nearest and dearest of kinships, the closest and sweetest of human intimacies, that could explain such "wordless proximity." Strangers, acquaintances, when thrown together *must* politely talk; brother and sister, husband and wife, may be confidently, blessedly silent!'

She remembered now, with ready suspicion, that, when she and Evan first met suddenly afterwards, he scarcely evinced surprise. We have said that it was because his heart was full of her image, but this idea, this hope, did not occur to Eveline then—her mind was a chaos. How she got through the remainder of that day she never knew; she had but one wish—to shun her mother's eye. To seclude herself in her own room would attract attention; thus she remained in the drawing-room and affected to read. She opened a book at the page and point where she had last left off. Alas! it was beyond the power of books to soothe or win her from herself now. The Lethean power of the novelist had departed, and her whole mind seemed out of tune. She threw aside the volume and

took up another, but a cry escaped her as it fell from her hands. It was Bulwer's 'Alice, or the Mysteries'; the *name* seemed to enter her heart like a knife, and she rushed away to her room. The dressing-bell for dinner, when it rang, found her very pale, and wrestling, as it were, with a strange and unusual pain that was eating its way into her heart. She bathed her face again and again, but failed to hide the dark shadows under her eyes or the inflammation of their delicate lids. And at dinner-time that evening an additional stab was given to her in the most casual and unexpected way. Her father had brought from his club to Maviswood Carslogie of the Black Watch, a heedless and thoughtless young fellow, of whom she overheard Allan making some inquiries concerning Cameron of Stratherroch.

'Oh, Strath is jolly as a sandboy,' replied Carslogie, 'but he has some mysterious affair of the heart on just now.'

'How?'

'In the usual way. There is a pretty girl he goes about with to all public places, but introduces to no one. She is without a chaperone, and no one knows whether she is maid, wife, or widow; funny, by Jove, isn't it?'

Carslogie said this in a low voice to Allan, yet not so low but that it reached the ears of Eveline, who had some difficulty in concealing her agitation. With instinctive tenderness Allan glanced at his sister and skilfully changed the subject to the then invariable topic of Arabi Pasha and 'the coming row in Egypt.' Times there were when she had thought that she would condescend to go once again to their trysting-place and seek an explanation; but now, after what Carslogie had said, wild horses should not drag her there! She would never upbraid Evan with his baseness, never more would she go there; she would simply tear his image out of her heart, and let the matter end. But this was easier to say than to achieve. Her soul seemed to have become numbed within her—frozen,

if we may use such terms. Even in the matter of Sir Paget she was conscious now of feeling neither repugnance nor ridicule, though she felt a little repentance at her opposition to the wishes of her father and mother, and for the duplicity of which she had been guilty towards them in her love for an unworthy object, and meeting him in secret, as if she had been a sewing-girl or waiting-maid, and not the daughter of a peer, and putting herself, perhaps, in an equivocal position. She confided in Olive; otherwise her heart, she thought, would burst.

'The heart is said to be "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,"' said Olive, 'but I must confess that this affair passes my comprehension. He cannot be in love with *two* at once; yet I have read of such things. Forget him; you must do that—at least. You endure too much, Eveline; you believed in him too much, and, I fear, hoped too much. Even friendship has its limits; how much more so love.'

'And but yesterday I was so happy—happy in a love the end of which I could not foresee!' wailed poor Eveline, on her cousin's bosom.

What was she like, this Alice? Her rival—oh, disgrace! Fair or dark—she remembered that she was pale and pretty. But what did it matter, thought the now crushed girl, as she tossed feverishly on her pillow in the gloom and solitude of the night, when even our thoughts seem to assume distinct outlines that become sharp and vivid. Night had passed—a new day dawned, and how far, far off seemed yesterday! The sun has risen in his glory; the blackbirds were singing in the dew-laden shrubberies of Maviswood; and the pale mists were clearing off Torduff and Kirkyetton Craig, the highest summits of the lovely Pentlands. It was late ere Eveline had wept herself to sleep; but to her it seemed as if she had not slept at all. Thus it was proportionately late when she awoke heavily to the morning of a new day. She had given her whole soul with joy

to her hopeless love for Evan—hopeless, but pure—though any happy end to it she could not foresee ; but this was a bitter collapse she did not anticipate, and now her ‘ occupation was gone.’

Was she the same Eveline Graham who but yesterday morning shook off sleep so lightly, and rose fresh, strong, and full of hope, with the conviction that her secret lover was true to her and to this hopeless passion? Her affectionate heart was crushed ; her self-esteem was in the dust ; her proud head lay low indeed ; and for the first time in her young life she had learned what it is to be cut to the soul—to be completely humbled. And Alice—who and what was *she* ?

‘ And oh, Olive, how am I to meet mamma ? ’ was the first exclamation after they had got rid of Mademoiselle Clairette.

She knew she would have to join in the conversation of the breakfast-table, when all her vigilance would be requisite to prevent her from pitfalls of suspicious silence or confusion of manner, with the helpless air and uncertain voice of one who seeks to conceal a new and hitherto unknown sorrow, and to undergo, with her sad, white, humiliated face, her mother’s critical and observant eyes. If, in desperation, she did not act a part, that watchful mother would be sure to detect a change, and that there was *something* wrong. Eveline knew well that she would soon detect every flicker of her eyelashes, every tremor of the heavy white lids, that would droop in spite of her now ; but luckily Lady Aberfeldie was busy in her boudoir with the housekeeper and Mr. Tappleton the butler, giving orders ; for Sir Paget Puddicombe would arrive ere long !

Carslogie had gone back to Edinburgh, of course, last night. He would be with Evan Cameron this morning on parade, and so forth ; would the latter question him about his visit to Maviswood—about *her* perhaps ? But what did it matter now whether he did so or did not ? Nothing—less than nothing ! How long the hours seemed now when they were empty—*quite* empty of all but bitterness ! Meanwhile days passed on, and

Cameron came, as was his wont, to the usual places of meeting, but Eveline was never there. What had happened—how was she detained? Had an illness come upon her? His mind was a prey to the keenest anxiety, which he was without the means of allaying. He could not write to ask for any explanation, neither could he call at Maviswood after the somewhat studied coldness of his last reception there by her father and mother. At each place and spot where so lately they had met and wandered, the thoughts that found utterance there, and many a tender caress, came potently and poignantly back to memory now. Where was she, what doing, how engaged and with whom—in sickness or in health?—he asked of himself with endless iteration.

Trivialities are often associated with the greatest eventualities in our lives. Thus long in the memory of Evan would his last visit to one of these beloved spots be associated with the shrill notes of a mavis perched upon the topmost bough of a tree. Ignorant as yet of what he himself had done, ignorant also of the mischief his friend Carslogie had unintentionally done him by retailing some mess-room gossip, in the vagueness of his thoughts and ideas of the whole situation, which we shall ere-long unravel, Cameron was inclined to attribute the total cessation of Eveline's meetings with him to some mysterious influence of Hawke Holcroft—if Holcroft it was whom he saw in the dusk. From Carslogie he learned that 'she was looking well and jolly,' as he phrased it. When Allan rejoined he would hear more of her, he hoped; but Allan's sick leave was protracted from time to time, and none seemed to know *when* he would be with the regiment again. Once these parted lovers saw each other, but for a moment only! Accompanied by a groom, Eveline rode at a canter past him on a lonely part of the road near Maviswood, her eyes full of unshed tears, her face pale with resentment, and her veil in her teeth. Past him, as if he was a stranger!

‘Why stop to speak or expect an explanation?’ thought the girl. ‘In this world do not actions speak louder a thousand times than words can ever do?’

She was a Graham of Dundargue, and would show him that she was not of the kind of stuff that facile Amelias or patient Griseldas are made! Yet to pass him by thus cost her a mighty effort, though to Eveline it seemed that there was nothing left for her now ‘but to wrestle valiantly with that pain which, in the world’s eye, degrades the woman who smarts under it—the pain of an unshared love.’

CHAPTER XXV.—‘THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO.’

‘YOUNG STRATHERROCH seems to have accepted the situation. He is much too sharp and well-bred a man not to have seen that he was—well—in the way rather,’ said Lady Aberfeldie to her husband one afternoon. ‘One thing is certain at least, he has ceased to visit here.’

‘Dropped out of the hunt—yes,’ assented the peer, as he filled and lit his briar-root. ‘Poor fellow! he was—or is—undoubtedly fond of our little girl.’

‘Such fondness was folly in one so poor; and now, as Sir Paget comes to-day, I do not see why we should not have the two marriages at once. I am most anxious to have all this fuss ended and done with.’

‘There are several deeds to draw and so forth in the matter of Allan and Olive; and as for Eveline she has not yet consented.’

‘She must do so now, I presume,’ said Lady Aberfeldie, impatiently wafting aside with her white hand a cloud of smoke the peer was creating.

‘Both marriages,’ said he reflectively; ‘but how if the regiment goes on foreign service?—and the corps expects orders of readiness daily, I understand.’

'Allan can send in his papers.'

'Impossible! You do not consider what you say.'

'He is not well enough to go abroad.'

'He is too well to remain behind; and if well enough to marry I fear that F.M. the Commander-in-Chief will deem him well enough to march.'

'Anyway it will secure Olive's fortune in the family.'

'It is secured as it is by her father's will so long as Allan is willing to consent; but, as our loving daughter-in-law, there will be no necessity for the enforcement of the clause that is so grotesque. As regards Sir Paget and Eveline——'

'Leave me to manage Eveline,' said Lady Aberfeldie bluntly and loftily.

The result of her management was soon apparent, though she knew not that circumstances, of which she was as yet unaware, were playing into her hands, and would yet more completely do so.

'Sir Paget, as you know, Eveline, will be here to-day,' said she, with an arm round her daughter's neck; 'and we—that is, your papa and I—trust, child, that you will receive him as you ought, and wear the jewels he sent you.'

Lady Aberfeldie used her softest yet firmest voice as she spoke to Eveline, but it sounded to the latter as the voice of one who was a long, long way off. She made no immediate reply; but with her hands tightly interlaced, as if thereby she would quell emotion, seemed to be gazing down at her nicely pointed little foot that rested on a velvet fender-stool.

'Why mope here, growing pale and thin, for a thing without substance—a dream—a shadow, Eveline; you understand me?'

'A dream—a shadow, indeed, mamma!'

'You hear me, child?' said her mother.

'Yes, mamma,' replied Eveline, who seemed to shiver with cold as her mother left her, but with a long backward glance that had more of menace than entreaty in it.

‘He never loved me,’ Eveline was thinking. ‘I have given my heart for nothing, and am now cast aside for another, like a broken toy discarded by a child. He dared to trifle with me—my father’s daughter! It is clear now that he fancied, or merely pretended, to be in love with me, while all the time his heart was given to—*Alice!*’

And she would have been either more or less than human, if with her just indignation there did not mingle a certain sentiment of revenge that bore her up in the part she meant to act now; though she shrank as yet from the conviction that, when esteem dies, love dies with it.

So that evening Eveline wore the suite of jewels—such jewels as Bond Street alone can furnish—and Sir Paget, as he sat by her side, jerked his little bald head about in the exuberance of joy, and in a way that was really alarming. Olive was looking radiantly beautiful, in a brilliant dinner costume, with Allan’s Maltese suite of diamonds and pearls sparkling on her neck and arms, which Lady Aberfeldie had urged her to don in honour of Sir Paget, and in defiance of a *moue* and pitiful glance of Eveline, who had no small difficulty in acquitting herself at dinner in her new rôle of *fiancée*, but nearly broke down when she heard Sir Paget raise his voice and say to her father something that he was not sorry he might say with a clear conscience and as a matter of fact.

‘Oh, by the way, Aberfeldie, when I arrived at the railway-station this morning I witnessed a very tender leave-taking between a young friend of yours and a most charming girl—gad, the fellow has taste—a girl whom he was seeing off, to London, I presume, by the Flying Scotsman; it was quite pathetic, by Jove!’

‘A young friend of ours—whom do you mean, Sir Paget?’ asked Lady Aberfeldie.

‘Cameron, of the Black Watch, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Dundargue—you remember,’ said Sir Paget, playing

with the stem of his champagne-glass, and not daring to look at Eveline, whose white hand he saw trembling as she toyed with her grapes.

'Oh—oh—indeed—and the young lady——'

'Had "Mrs. Cameron" painted on all her luggage—great Indian overlands, some of it.'

'*Mrs. Cameron,*' repeated Lady Aberfeldie, whose aristocratic face shone in spite of herself at these tidings, while Lord Aberfeldie looked flushed and perplexed, and like Allan, who pitied his poor sister, remained silent. This astounding intelligence was to poor Eveline as 'the last straw' to the overladen camel; she betrayed no outward emotion, though her heart and spirit were completely broken down, for a phase of duplicity which she could never have conceived was now suddenly laid bare to her. When, with her aunt and cousin, she retired to the drawing-room, the latter pressed her hand affectionately and caressingly, while the former, too proud or too prudent to refer to what they had just heard so greatly to her satisfaction, sat in a shady corner and slowly fanned herself in silence with a great round feather fan. An emotion of jealous spite at young Cameron, with rivalry, passion, and ambition to possess a young, beautiful, and highly born wife, all now inspired Sir Paget, who, to do him justice in the anecdote he had told, had told no more than the truth, and, for the happiness of Evan Cameron, we are sorry to say it. But though now permitting herself quietly to drift with the stream of events, and to become a tool in the hands of others, it was impossible for Eveline, when with Sir Paget in the grounds, or when alone in the drawing-room, not to shrink from his now privileged caresses and attentions; thus once she shocked him by saying, as she withdrew her hands from his clasp, 'Oh, Sir Paget, do you really mean to marry a woman who does not and never can love you?'

'Do not say "never can." How can we know what the future may have for me—for *us*, my dear girl?'

‘Who, indeed, save One!’ sighed the girl wearily.

‘I would rather have half your heart than the whole of any other woman’s,’ said Sir Paget gallantly, while recapturing her hands, and jerking out his head in turtle fashion.

‘My whole heart,’ thought Eveline, ‘is—oh, no—*was* full of Evan, but can have no vacant corner for any other, especially such a man as this.’

And even while she thought this she shivered as if with cold, when in right of his new position he caressed her.

‘How, with all their innate pride, papa and mamma are content to abandon me to this absurd little man Puddicombe, as they do, passes my comprehension,’ said she to Olive. ‘Puddicombe—such an absurd name too!’ she added, with a little laugh that was hysterical; ‘and what object can the splendour of his settlements be to them? They seem to ignore the fact that the Grahams of Dundargue were barons of the Scottish Parliament when the ancestors of half the British peerage were hewers of wood and drawers of water—peasantry and artisans!’

So in the bloom of her youth and beauty, the time ‘when the light that surrounds us is all from within,’ Eveline Graham was to become a victim at the altar after all—after all! And Cameron seemed to have prepared the path for her, for, stunned by his too apparent duplicity, she schooled herself for the *rôle* of indifference to fate; but this was chiefly by day, for often at night she would lie where she had thrown herself, across her bed, forgetting even to undress, her tear-blotted face covered by her soft arm, and so in the morning the wondering and sympathizing Clairette would find her. June was creeping on now, with its sunny, fragrant breath; there were white and purple blossoms in the parterres of the garden; the graceful laburnums were dropping their golden petals in showers over the rosebuds and green lawns that were bordered by dark shining myrtles and deep-tinted laurels and rhododendrons.

From the fields came the rasping sound made by the mower as he whetted his scythe, before which the rich feathered grass and the wild flowers are done to death ; elsewhere the joyous haymakers were hard at work, and the dust of June began to roll along the roads before the wind in the sunshine.

'June!' thought Eveline. 'Where will the winter find me?'

The preparations for her marriage were hurried on with a rapidity that appalled her ; but, dear as the scheme was to Lady Aberfeldie, a somewhat unexpected event delayed that of Allan and Olive Raymond, and gave the Aberfeldie family once more something else to think of. One evening when all the others were in Edinburgh save himself and Olive—for Eveline's forthcoming marriage kept all rather busy now—Allan, full of his own happy thoughts, and the joy that would be his ere long, was smoking in the grounds, when he was startled by a shrill cry that proceeded from an open window of the house—a French window that opened to the ground—and swift as light a man dashed past him and disappeared among the thick shrubberies.

'A thief!' was Allan's first thought ; 'but whose cry was that?' was his second.

The face of the intruder, who passed near him—a pale and familiar one, seen just as Cameron had before seen it—seemed to be that of Hawke Holcroft.

'Impossible!' thought Allan, as he hurried towards the house ; but it was not until he had further proofs that he became aware that the face he had seen—the face of ill-omen—was that of Holcroft !

He hurried into the apartment through the open window, and was horrified to find Olive prostrate on the floor, with her arms outspread, and in a fainting condition. He raised her up and laid her on a sofa, withdrawing the pillow from under her head, and looked round for water to lave her face and hands, one of which clutched a pen. A large sealskin cigar-

case, with Rio Hondo cigars in it—a case which he well remembered to have seen in possession of Holcroft—lay upon the floor. How came it there, unless the man he saw was, beyond all doubt, Hawke Holcroft? Olive's cheque-book—for she had a bank account of her own—lay open on her davenport, and Allan's eye caught the counterfoil of one, dated that very day, and almost wet still, for £400.

'Four hundred pounds!' he gasped, and tried to tear open his necktie, while the room swam round him. 'O God! can it be that she is playing fast and loose with me and that double-dyed villain?'

That she should have any intercourse, verbal or written, with such a wretch excited in Allan a gust of rage and bewilderment, disgust, horror, and intense perplexity. Yet it might be all quite explainable—even the cheque. She opened her eyes and closed them again, and pathetically he besought her to tell him what had happened, but could elicit no reply. Her slender throat seemed parched, as she failed to articulate.

'Oh, Olive,' said he, 'if I alarm you, forgive me! You know how I love you. Why torture me by this silence—tell me all—*what* has happened—*who* has been here?'

But he urged and pleaded in vain; her teeth were clenched.

'Is it some folly—some girlish imprudence—*what* is it? Dear love, only tell me?'

Still she was silent, and Allan's brows knit darkly and ominously, while, in the excited state of his nerves, he felt sharp twinges in the arm that had been fractured, and, when consciousness came partially back to Olive, she covered her face with her hands, and sobbed heavily and spasmodically. What had happened? Why was she so suddenly cast down, hurled, as it were, from the joy, rapture, and repose of an hour ago, to the apparent agony and shame of the present? Nothing could be elicited from her, and the next day found her in a species of hysterical fever, and in the hands of the doctor. In

a short time it was discovered that her cheque—an open one—payable to Mr. Hawke Holcroft, and duly endorsed by that personage, had been presented and cashed at a bank; yet no explanation could be elicited from her about it.

‘She had on the ill-omened diamonds, mother,’ said Allan interrogatively. ‘How was this?’

‘I lent them to her, as the bride of the house, and doubtless she had been trying them on when—when——’

‘This scoundrel thrust himself upon her presence?’

‘I suppose so,’ said Lady Aberfeldie, weeping.

‘Evil always comes of these accursed stones!’

‘It is simply outrageous,’ said Lord Aberfeldie sternly and loftily, ‘that even the family of the most humble tradesman should be haunted by a Frankenstein—a swindler and worse, like this; but that a house like mine—the house of a peer of the realm——’

And his lordship in his indignation paused as utterance failed him.

‘Mystery is involved here!’ exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie, ‘and I dislike it intensely, as vulgar and very bad style.’

‘By Jove! I should think so,’ added Allan gloomily; ‘but this affair, like Cameron’s marriage, beats the mysteries of Udolpho!’

CHAPTER XXVI.—‘GUP,’ AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

AND now, ere it is too late, to let a little light on what must seem a mystery, and to tell a story which Eveline was not to hear until the fatal die was cast.

‘Dear Evan,’ said a handsome girl, as she interlaced her slender fingers on Cameron’s arm lovingly in one of the most secluded walks of the Princes Street Gardens, and under the shadow of the towering castle rock, ‘I cannot bear to see you looking so unhappy—what *is* the matter?’

'Eveline Graham has ceased to meet me. She is ill—or—or I know not what!'

'Cannot you ascertain?'

'No. I have no means of ascertaining; moreover, only the other day she cut me.'

'Cut you—passed you?'

'Cut me dead!'

'Surely that was bad in taste.'

'And cruel, too—so unlike her, Alice darling, that I know not what to think.'

'She has resolved to accept her rich old baronet—that is all; and I shall hear all about it when I am far away from you in India. How strange,' added the girl dreamily, while a great, yet pensive, joy lighted up her blue eyes, 'how strange to think that I am still in Edinburgh, and so far away from *him*, when there was a time when I wondered if anyone in this world was ever so happy as I, when dear stupid Duncan asked me to be his wife! And oh, Evan dear, but for you and your great kindness to us, my heart must have broken, and I should never have seen Duncan more!'

The fair speaker was the Alice whose name had unconsciously escaped Evan, as his heart was full of a great love and pity for her—the wife of his younger brother Duncan, from whom she had been separated in consequence of a foolish jealous quarrel, and having been, through that, sent home by him from India, had no other friend in Europe to whom to turn for succour and support than the kind-hearted but half-penniless Laird of Stratherroch, who had at last effected an explanation and reconciliation between them.

When quartered in cantonments, in the first year of their marriage, not far from Hurdwar on the Ganges (where Allan got the idol he gave to Olive), there seemed to be no more loving and attached couple than Duncan Cameron and his little wife Alice, and both were prime favourites with the

garrison ; he, for his fine bearing which made him the pattern officer of his regiment—a Bengal infantry corps—his skill in horsemanship, as a marksman and pigsticker, and his general *bonhomie* and good nature ; she, for her beauty and sweetness, her great abundance of animal spirits, and a charming *espièglerie* that made her the object of attention from all. Ladies were scarce in these cantonments so far 'up country,' and thus Alice proved a wonderful attraction to all the young subs at the band-stand or on the racecourse and elsewhere ; and they hovered about her rather more than Duncan Cameron quite relished. She was a leading feature at all the entertainments given by Sir Bevis Batardeau, G.C.S.I., the brigadier, and his wife ; and indeed no ball, picnic, or dance was deemed complete without the presence of Alice Cameron. Now, Sir Bevis was a notorious old *roué*, and the cause of much 'gup,' as scandal or gossip is called in India. He was a middle-aged man of fashion, grizzled, and rather bald, with a reddish nose and wicked eyes, while Lady Batardeau, his senior by a year or two, was a kind and motherly woman, who loved Alice dearly ; and 'gup' of course asserted that the General did so too in a fashion of his own, and many things were said that never reached as yet the ears of Duncan Cameron. The latter was sent to some distance from the cantonments on a particular duty, and poor Alice was left to mope in her bungalow alone.

'I often thought,' she said, 'if anything should ever separate us, I would die. The fear smote me like a sword's point, Evan, and the night Duncan left me a jackal howled fearfully in the compound. Was it ominous of evil ? I fear so—for separated terribly we were fated to be, through no fault of mine.'

These forebodings made her pass sleeplessly the hot and breathless Indian nights, while hourly the cantonment *ghurries* were clanged, and the jackals howled in the prickly hedges and the mosquitoes seemed a thousand times more annoying—

no chowrie would whisk them out of the muslin curtains ; and her breakfast seemed so insipid now, and Gunga Ram, the *khansaman*, or native butler, could find nothing to tempt her appetite ; yet Gunga, though, like most Hindostanees, doubtful of the virtue of every European woman, was devoted to his own particular *mehm Sahib*.

Every morning she had been wont to watch at the open venetian blinds of their bungalow for the handsome figure of Duncan returning from the early parade, while the sun was yet on the verge of the horizon ; and every evening was spent together in delicious idleness—riding on the course, promenading by the band-stand, or wandering among the groves where the baubool breathes an exquisite perfume from its bells of gold, as the oleander does from its clusters of pink and white blossoms, and where the lovely little tailor-bird sews two leaves together and swings in his sweet-scented nest from the bough of some little tree. Hourly she longed for the return of Duncan. She was a petted favourite with Lady Batardeau, who, when calling on her one day, found her asleep under the veranda outside Cameron's bungalow on a long low Indian arm-chair. Thinking how charming the girl-wife looked, Lady Batardeau, in playful kindness, slipped on one of her fingers a rose-diamond ring, which had been in the past time a gift to herself from Sir Bevis, when she valued his gifts more than she had reason to do now ; and having done this, she went softly and laughingly away. To the joy of Alice, Cameron returned suddenly while she was yet puzzling herself to account for the presence of the ring, and for a time, in the happiness of their reunion, she forgot all about it, till he, while toying with her pretty hands, observed it on her finger.

‘A magnificent ring, Alice,’ said he. ‘Where did it come from?’

‘That is more than I can tell you.’

‘How?’ he asked.

‘I found that it had been slipped on my finger when I was asleep.’

‘By whom?’

‘I cannot say, Duncan dear.’

On examining the jewel he saw graven on the inside the name of that notorious old *roué* and Lothario, the brigadier! Lady Batardeau had left the cantonments for a while, and poor Alice could give no explanation as to *how* the mysterious ring with the name of Sir Bevis thereon came to be on her finger. Duncan loved her so trustfully, so utterly, that doubt failed for a time to find a place in his gallant heart; but ‘gup’ had playfully asserted that the old brigadier immensely admired young Mrs. Cameron—he recalled some jests he had heard, and now the poison they breathed was stealing upon his senses, and his face grew white as death.

Duncan mistook the genuine confusion of Alice for guilt—her dismay for dread of detection, and the whole affair for a feature in an intrigue. He knew how keen and bitter was scandal in India, and already he saw himself a source of mockery and disgrace, and figuring, perhaps, in the columns of the *Hurkara*! He saw it all now! He had been sent on duty to a distance for some days, as he believed out of his turn, and by the express order of the brigadier. That circumstance had surprised him, but he believed it was fully explained now by finding the ring of Sir Bevis on his wife’s finger, and he became transported with fury. Alice cowered for a time beneath the expression she read in his face. Could it be possible, he thought, that she was proving as one of the ‘dead-sea apples of life, which a mocking fate so often throws in our lap, charming to the imagination, but bitter to the sense?’

‘Duncan!’ said Alice softly and imploringly; but he felt all the mute despair of a broken heart, the agony of a shaken faith, and he put her soft white hands gently from him, as if he would never seek them in this life again.

He at once sought the presence of the brigadier, who, on hearing what he had to say, certainly—to do him justice—was rather bewildered.

‘I beg leave, sir, to return to you this ring,’ said Duncan, tossing it contemptuously on the table.

‘My ring—my wife’s ring it was——’

‘Was—eh?’

‘Yes, Captain Cameron. Where did you find it?’

‘Where you placed it, I doubt not.’

‘I do not understand your tone and manner, Captain Cameron; but I certainly placed it on the finger——’

‘Of my wife,’ said Duncan hoarsely and scornfully. ‘I thank you for your kind attention, but trust that it will end here ere worse come of it. I am not a man to be trifled with, Sir Bevis.’

Now Sir Bevis had no dislike to be thought ‘a gay Lothario, a sad dog, and all that sort of thing,’ so he actually simpered provokingly, shrugged his shoulders, and said deprecatingly:

‘Really, you wrong Mrs. Cameron.’

‘She has deceived me!’ exclaimed Duncan, furiously.

‘If a woman can’t deceive her own husband, *whom* may she deceive?’ asked the unwise brigadier.

‘In the days of the pistol this matter would not have ended here.’

‘Come, come, don’t let you and I fall to carte and tierce in this fashion,’ said the general; ‘it may be explainable——’

‘I want no explanations!’

‘As you please. It seems there is a little romance in most lives——’

‘With your grey hairs you should have outlived all that, I think.’

Now his years proved a sore point with old Sir Bevis, and he became inflamed with anger; but, ere he could retort, Duncan had jerked his sword under his left arm and swept from his

presence with a rather withering expression in his face, and that very evening saw Alice in the train for Delhi, *en route* to Europe.

'Innocent, I suffer all the shame and all the agony of guilt ! Oh, it is hard, Duncan—very, very hard,' were the last words she said, brokenly, to her husband, who heard with a stern silence that astonished her.

Now that Lady Batardeau, on her return to the cantonments, had explained the whole story of the ring, Duncan was—when too late, for his wife was on the sea—full of shame and contrition for his suspicions and severity, and had written to crave the pardon of Alice and insure her return to him again ; hence the farewell and departure of 'Mrs. Cameron,' with her overlands and other baggage, as witnessed by the sharp little eyes of Sir Paget Puddicombe at the Waverley Station, and thus it was that, by an unexplained mistake, two fond hearts were separated for ever ; but separated they would have been eventually by fate or fortune—the lack of fortune, rather—as time may show. But for a time poor Eveline had to ponder bitterly on the humiliating thought that Evan Cameron had been thinking of *another* face, form, and name while in the act of caressing herself, and that the other was—as Sir Paget had left them no reason to doubt, and never himself doubted—Evan Cameron's wife !

CHAPTER XXVII.—OLIVE'S VISITOR.

ANOTHER mystery has now to be accounted for—the state in which Allan found Olive when her cry reached him as he idled with his cigar in the grounds at Maviswood in the evening, when the rest of the family circle were in town. Olive was seated alone in one of the drawing-rooms when a gentleman was announced—a gentleman who no doubt thought Allan was absent in Edinburgh also.

'Mr. Holcroft.'

‘Mr. Holcroft!’ A book she was reading fell from the hand of Olive, and she started to her feet as that personage, hat in hand, stood smilingly before her. For a moment she could scarcely believe her eyes as they met the pale, watery, and shifty ones of her unexpected visitor.

Terror and horror filled her heart on finding herself face to face with this man—an assassin in intent! It was too horrible—too *outré* and grotesque to think of. But what was his intention now? She was not left long in ignorance. Why did she not rush to the bell—summon the household, and have the daring intruder expelled or arrested? But no—she felt a very coward just then, with a great dread of Allan discovering him, and a heavy, sickening foreboding of coming evil. There came dreamily to her memory, too, some threatening words of his when he had said that he would let no man come between them, and that, though he might fail to compel her to love him, he might compel her to marry him; but neither love nor marriage was in the mind of her horrible visitor just then. Mr. Hawke Holcroft seemed rather ‘down on his luck,’ and looked somewhat shabby and seedy. The last fragment of his patrimony had been swallowed up; his betting-book had proved a mistake, as he had for some time past backed the wrong horses; cards had failed him, and play of all kinds; in short, he was desperate, and hence his appearance at Maviswood. To attempt the *rôle* of a lover again, after all that had passed, and after all that he was aware must be known to Miss Raymond, was, he knew, impossible; but he had a trump-card to play in the way of extortion—plain, blunt, rascally extortion; so, conceiving that the girl was utterly alone, he could not for the life of him resist bantering her a little, all the more as the utter loathing and dread her face expressed enraged him.

‘Mr. Holcroft!’ she exclaimed, in a breathless voice, as she recoiled and became white as a lily.

'Yes, Hawke Holcroft, the man your fatal beauty has made him,' said he, with melodramatic gloom and folded arms, 'when I met you first I met my fate—a love that was my doom. But for you, would I ever have been mad enough to attempt the life of Allan Graham?'

'How dare you come here—how dare you speak to me thus!' said Olive, glancing at the bell-handle; but he planted himself between it and her.

'The love of you came to me when first you looked into my face,' he resumed, in his melodramatic style. 'I remember it was but a smile—a smile; yet a mist came before my eyes—a something stirred my heart. Ah, Olive Raymond, it was your beautiful eyes that suddenly kindled new life within me—that will only end with the old.'

Olive was more irritated than alarmed now.

'How dare you come here?' she asked.

'I can't help it—needs must when old Boots drives,' said he; 'I came to show you a work of art. Look here!'

From his pocket-book he drew out and held before her at arm's length the cabinet photo of herself in a ball-dress; the photo, or one like it, that she had the folly to give him at Dundargue; but to her horror and dismay she saw that it had been reproduced, reversed, and manipulated in some way by some low photographer, and combined with one of Holcroft himself, posed as if in the act of embracing her, forming a strange group of two, whose likenesses there would be no mistaking, more especially that of her, as it was a miraculous work of art in its truth and individuality. It was Olive to the life, with her brightest and sweetest expression now bent on *his* face!

'I am glad you recognise us,' said he mockingly, as he replaced the photo in its receptacle, and the latter in his breast pocket; 'and now to business. What would your drawing-room hero think of this, if he saw it? Ha, ha! He did not approve

of Byron at Dundargue, I remember—would rather we stuck to Dr. Watts's hymns, I suppose—"How doth the little busy bee," and so forth; well, like that industrious insect, I mean to "improve the shining hour." How would he—how will you and your family, with all their cursed Scotch pride—like to see this photo in every shop-window exposed for sale to the British public, among ballet-girls in snowstorms, countesses swinging in hammocks, bishops, and generals—murderers, too, perhaps—eh? In a week or two I may have a million copies of this precious photo for sale in London and elsewhere. Do you realize the meaning of this, my scornful beauty? and the result it must have on you, your name, your character, your family, and your future—Miss Olive Raymond posed in the arms of Hawke Holcroft?

'Oh, heavens!' said Olive, in a low voice like a whisper; 'are you a man or a devil?'

'A little of both, perhaps—I am what circumstances have made me.'

'Daring wretch!—oh, what wrong have I ever done you that you should cross my path and agonize me thus?'

Holcroft laughed; he knew that she had a more than handsome allowance at her guardian's behest and her own bank account. He was without remorse or pity, for cowardice and selfishness were alike the ruling features of his character, and he thought to control the tongue and action of Olive through her own pride and her love of Allan with an eye to future monetary extortions. Pressing her left hand upon her heart, as if she felt—as no doubt she did—a spasm of pain there, and with her eyes almost closed, she said, 'In the name of mercy, give me back that photo!'

'After I have had it so carefully improved as a work of art? No, no, Miss Raymond,' said he, in his detestable sneering tone; 'but I shall be content to forego my interest in the copy-right for a certain reasonable consideration.'

'A consideration. I do not understand you, sir,' said Olive faintly, and clutching a table for support.

'Plainly, then, I mean a cheque for three hundred—no, let me say four hundred—pounds, and you had better be quick about it, as I have no time to spare, and, truth to tell, have no desire to renew my acquaintance with any of the Aberfeldie folks again.'

'Four hundred pounds?'

'That is the sum, Miss Raymond.'

Like a blind person, she feebly and irresolutely seemed to grope with her key about the lock of her davenport, and Holcroft said, 'Permit me to assist you.'

He unlocked it, and threw open the lid. Mechanically she seated herself, and began to write, while conscious that this bantering villain was still addressing her.

'And so old Puddicombe has come to the front again,' said he. 'An odd marriage it will be—his with Miss Graham—Brummagem allying itself with the Middle Ages—the counting-house getting a line in Burke's Peerage.'

'There,' said she, handing him the cheque, which he received with a low mocking bow, 'now give me the photo.'

'Thanks, with pleasure. Perhaps you may wish to frame it. Now, listen to me,' he said, through his set teeth, 'if you divulge a word of this interview, or make known the power I have over you by means of this photograph, "then and in that case," as I believe your father's will is phrased, I shall at once introduce it to the British public. I give you this copy for your four hundred pounds, but retain the negative!'

Then it was that, as he withdrew, a cry escaped from her overcharged breast—the cry overheard by Allan, and she had only power left her to conceal the odious photo in the breast of her dress when she fell fainting on the floor, where she was found. To destroy it was one of her first acts, when consciousness returned, and she was alone; but what availed the de-

struction of this one, when her tormentor possessed the power of producing others without limit? A great horror possessed her now—a dread and gloom came over her, with a painful nervous terror—a kind of hunted emotion—a fear of what might next ensue! Yet she took no one into her confidence, not even Allan—on her part a fatal error. After all her past sweet intercourse with him, their delayed marriage—delayed by the illness incident to Holcroft's outrage—and his too probable speedy departure on foreign service, was she now to harrow him up by a reference to her folly, her petulance, and her silly degrading flirtation with this man, who now proved such a pitiful, such an unfathomable villain? What if Allan should see suddenly that fatal photo in a shop-window? This possibility plainly stared her in the face; yet she was silent, and believed that, ere this issue came to pass, she was doomed to be tortured and victimized by Holcroft again; and the thought, the fear of this, gave her a kind of fever of the spirit, which made her quite ill, and bewildered her friends.

Money had evidently been given by her to Holcroft—no small sum too; and for what purpose? Remembering his threat if she exposed his rascality, her tongue was now tied by a most unwise terror. Ill and harassed, she remained much in her room and avoided society. Allan, as he said resentfully, failed 'to see the situation,' and in a gust of pique and anger, feeling himself somewhat degraded by Olive's bearing, resigned his extended leave and joined his regiment, as Olive said, resolved to 'sulk in Edinburgh Castle rather than have an explanation,' rather unreasonably forgetting that she had steadily refused to give one. She felt painfully that the mystery of the money given to Holcroft was calculated to compromise her with her kindred; but what was that when compared with the awful thundercloud which hung over her, if he made the public use he threatened of the photo? Her soul died within her. Meanwhile Allan struggled hard to make himself believe

that he might yet be happy with Olive ; that he had perhaps no solid reason for being otherwise ; but it would not do.

‘Hang it, what does all this new mystery mean?’ he would say to himself. ‘We seem fated to misunderstand each other somehow. After all she seems to love her pride more than me, still!’

And Olive knew that it *was* mingled pride and fear that had opened a kind of chasm between her and Allan again ; yet a little sense, a little courage and candour, might have closed it speedily enough, and smoothed away the anger the complication raised at times within her ; while to Allan the situation was certainly an intolerable one, and Olive’s silence or reticence made it all the more so.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—WEDDED.

WHILE baffled in her attempts to bring about an explanation between Allan and Olive, and to smooth matters over with that wilful young lady (as she deemed her) and her naturally irritated *fiancé*, Lady Aberfeldie pushed on vigorously all the arrangements for the marriage of Sir Paget and the ill-starred Eveline—a marriage for which there seemed then no other reason than an avaricious desire of grand settlements and so forth. All Olive’s old pride and petulance (with much of irritation that was new) seemed to have come back to her, and, until the matter was cleared up regarding that mysterious visit of Holcroft to Maviswood, Allan had ceased to speak of marriage, and thus her spirit took fire at being doubted and humbled. She shrank; unwisely, from a simple confession that might have obviated all this, and from revealing the shame and affront to which this man possessed the power of exposing her.

‘I detest riddles, and care not to read them ; but the mask she is wearing—if a mask it be—may prove a costly one for herself and us all,’ thought Lord Aberfeldie and his son too.

‘Be content, Allan, to know that I gave that money—a trifle to me—to Mr. Holcroft in the hope to save us all—especially myself—from a probable public affront which might destroy me,’ said Olive on one occasion, her eyes flashing through her tears.

‘What mystery is this?—what can you have done? how be in his power? The assertion is absurd!’

‘Allan, cannot you trust me?’ she asked fondly and sadly yet proudly.

‘I know not what to think, but the whole affair looks—looks to me——’

‘How?’

‘Well, devilish queer,’ said he, as he cut the matter short and rode away, on which Olive dried her tears, crested up her head, and looked defiant.

‘If this tiresome couple, Olive and Allan, continue to pout and sulk at each other,’ said Lady Aberfeldie; ‘and he should decline to marry her, her money may be lost to us by her twenty-fifth birthday.’

‘Unless——’ the lord twisted his moustache and paused.

Unless what?’

‘Allan gets himself killed in Egypt,’ replied Lord Aberfeldie grimly.

‘Good heavens, do not say such a thing, even in jest!’

And now, perforce of their present situation, a change had come over the two cousins, Olive and Eveline: they never read, studied, sung, rode, or walked together, as they had been wont to do; a blight had come over both their lives apparently. Eveline only felt a little at ease when Sir Paget was absent from her, and even then she was pestered by his love-letters, which, like those written usually by men of advanced years, were of a grotesquely impassioned nature. ‘Attachments at that age are deeper, and less anxiety not to compromise one’s self is shown and felt,’ says an essayist. ‘After fifty, men are often wise enough to vote the writing of love-letters a bore, but some

carry on the practice to a very advanced age. Their protestations are then ingeniously flavoured with touches of the paternal, which sometimes entirely mislead the unsophisticated recipients.'

But the mere sight of Sir Paget's caligraphy, and of his heraldic note-paper, having a shield with some mysterious design thereon, and the motto '*Puddicombe petit alta*!' ('Puddicombe seeks lofty objects'), proved always enough for Eveline, who tossed it into the waste-paper basket unread, but torn into minute fragments, while a sigh of weariness and repugnance escaped her. Evan Cameron loved Allan Graham dearly as a friend, and had naturally a desire to be on the best terms with him as the brother of the girl to whom he had given all his heart. Thus, while meeting him daily on parade and at mess, he was sorely puzzled to account for the change he felt in Allan's manner to himself, as he knew not that the latter resented the 'Mrs. Cameron' episode as an insult to Eveline, his sister.

'I presume you know that my sister is on the point of marriage—indeed, that the day is fixed?' said Allan, rather grimly, to him one day, as he recalled the circumstance of how Evan greatly admired, to say the least of it, Eveline, and how her heart had responded thereto.

Cameron made no reply, but a sudden pallor overspread his handsome bronzed face, and all his studied calmness forsook him, while the memory of past hopes and joys shook his heart as if with a tempest of remembrance; but, stooping and half turning away to conceal the expression of his face, he attempted to light a cigar.

'What a sly fellow—a cunning dog—you are!' said Allan, with irritation of tone.

'In what way do you mean, Allan?' asked Cameron.

'Mean! How dare you ask, after your open admiration of my sister, Miss Graham, in a man in your position?'

Cameron mistook his meaning ; but the mistake failed to rouse any pride, as his heart was too crushed and sore just then.

‘Allan !’ he exclaimed, as tears almost welled up in his honest eyes, ‘I loved her—I love her still—God alone knows how well, how desperately, and how hopelessly.’

‘Hopelessly indeed,’ responded Allan, his cheek now aflame with anger ; ‘and you dare to tell me this after all that we know of yourself and Mrs. Cameron ?’

It was now Cameron’s turn to look indignant and astonished ; but in a few words he explained all.

‘Poor Evan !’ said Allan, as he wrung the hand of Cameron, whose head sank forward, so much was he overcome by emotion ; ‘I am glad of this explanation, but it comes too late—if indeed it could ever have served any purpose so far as your hopes with Eveline are concerned. In three days she is to be married—and now let us talk of the subject no more.’

But for a time black fury gathered in the heart of Cameron at Sir Paget Puddicombe, whose deductions, however, from all that he saw at the railway station were most natural.

‘In three days,’ he muttered again and again, ‘in three days, and she will be lost to me for ever !’

Eveline as yet was ignorant of her lover’s purity and innocence, nor would the knowledge of it have availed her much. There was a meek abandonment of her own will—of her own judgment, and Lady Aberfeldie caressed her more than she had ever done before, glad to find that she had become—my lady cared not why or how—compliant at last. She seemed quite passive and supine—resigned, Olive phrased it—and ready to do her mother’s bidding, for Evan Cameron seemed to have quite passed out of her life, though the name ‘Alice’ he had uttered seemed to be ever in her ears. She heard her mother speaking, and felt her caresses, but her eyes were suffused by a kind of mist. Yet more than once she had started amid her apathy, and thought, ‘Why am I still here—why don’t I run away to where they will never find me ?’

But she had no determining motive to decide her choice of place or scheme of life, though she felt that ere long, when these last three days were past, she would have to reconstruct her entire future, and from that future her heart recoiled and shrank. Her temples throbbed at the thought of this; her heart seemed alternately to thunder in her breast, and then to become unnaturally still. Again and again her mother told her that she would be surrounded by such wealth as falls to the lot of few; but she cared not for wealth, nor would it ever remove her gloomy and bitter reflections, and at the very name of her intended husband, though she evinced no emotion, a secret and involuntary shudder came over her. Society was intolerable just then, and she had much of it at Maviswood. How intolerable seemed lawn-tennis amid the bright sunshine, the soft thud of the balls upon the racquets, as they were shot over the nettings from court to court, the laughter of young and sweet voices, and the cries ever and anon of 'fifteen,' 'thirty,' 'fault,' and so on, as the jovial game progressed; and with evening came the inevitable dinner-party, and at night the dance. Allan, fearing to lacerate his sister's heart, knew not how to undeceive her in the matter of Cameron's supposed duplicity, though the truth or falsehood thereof could not affect her fate or her relations with Sir Paget now; but the true story escaped Carslogie quite casually when in conversation with Olive, who in due time related it to Eveline, in whose breast it created some very mingled emotions.

So Evan was innocent, while she had been feeling in her heart all the passion and pain—yea, a sentiment of vengeance—which women will feel, when they believe they have been loving unworthily. Early on her marriage morning she left her bed to think over all this. Wrapped in a snow-white *peignoir* (or dressing-robe), with all her undressed hair floating about her shoulders, and blown back by the warm summer breeze, she sat at the open window of her room, and looked dreamily

out with sad, sad eyes on the sunny landscape and the lovely hills all steeped in golden haze. How changed seemed its beauty now, and how she longed to be away from it—to be dead, in fact! Yet she was at an age when even to live ought to be in itself a joy. The fragrance of the dewy summer morning seemed to fill the outer world, and amid the intense stillness she heard only the voices of a lark high in the air and of a cushat dove in the coppice.

Her marriage morning—what a morning of woe to her! Her cheeks were pale—very, very pale; but, with her parted scarlet lips and her tangled waves of rich brown hair, she was beautiful as ever. The knowledge that her lover had not deceived her, but was true, roused her for a time, and filled her soul with a tempest of unexpected sorrow, compunction, and joy—sorrow that she had wronged him, compunction for the cruel mode in which she had treated him, and joy that his honour was unstained, and that he still was true; but oh! what must he think of her? Burying her face in her tremulous white hands, she wept like a child—wept as we are told ‘only women weep when their hearts break over the grave of a dead love,’ and threw herself across her bed.

‘God forgive me—God forgive me, and bless and comfort you, my love!’ she murmured. ‘Oh, Evan, I have wronged you—wronged you; but what does it avail us after all—after all?’

And she lay there crouched and gathered in a heap, as it were, till Olive and others who were to be her bridesmaids roused her and lifted her up and summoned Clairette. So her marriage-day had come, and, unless she fell ill or died, the ceremony was to go inexorably on.

Olive was far from well; every day she expected to hear of Holcroft’s photo being seen; her sole protection against that catastrophe, as yet, was the fear that ere it came to pass he would seek her presence at least once again, on an errand of

extortion. But, ill or well, she had to bear her part in the ceremony as a bridesmaid, and a charming one she looked. Allan, of course, was there too, but not as groomsman—a ‘fogie’ friend of Sir Paget officiated in that capacity, and more than once did the head of the latter jerk about in a way that was quite alarming as he entered the church, which was *en fête* for the occasion. To the tortured mind of his bride, she thought it would be a relief when the ceremony was over and the phantasmagoria that seemed to surround her had all passed away. ‘Is not certainty better than suspense?’ asks Rhoda Broughton; ‘night better than twilight? despair than the sickly flicker of an extinguishing hope?’

‘In marrying in this compulsory fashion, I do this poor man a great wrong,’ thought Eveline, ‘and condemn myself to a lifelong sorrow.’

And amid the sacrifice Lady Aberfeldie, calm and aristocratic, stood with a great air of dignity and grace peculiarly her own.

‘She will love Sir Paget in time, if love is necessary,’ she was thinking; ‘he is so good, so generous, and *so* rich.’

So rich—yes, with her—there lay the magnet and the secret of it all! The bridesmaids, all handsome girls, were uniformly costumed; among them amber-haired Ruby Logan, quite jubilant with reviving hopes of Allan. Eveline’s cold and now white lips murmured almost inaudibly the words she was bidden to say—the few but terrible words that made her a wedded wife—while her pallid face was but half seen amid the bridal veil, that seemed to float like filmy mist around her. Allan alone, who knew the real secret of her heart, looked pityingly, darkly, and gravely on, for it was a union of which—however his father and mother desired it—he did not approve.

For a time Eveline had actually schooled herself to think that marriage would give her a species of vengeance on the man who, she thought, had wronged and oppressed her. But now,

O Heaven! she loved the lost one more than ever, while death alone could unforge the fetters her lips were riveting. Was it ominous of evil that the ring dropped from her wedding-finger as Sir Paget placed it there? At last all was over. The great organ pealed forth the wedding-march. The bells rang joyously in the great spire overhead, and she was led forth by Sir Paget, leaning on his arm, a wedded wife. So time would pass on—days dawn, and nights close; the moon would shine amid the fleecy clouds on the quiet pastoral hills, on the great castellated mass of Dundargue, the woods and waters of her old home; but never would she be as she had been—as a happy, thoughtless girl—the Eveline Graham of the past years; never more could joy be hers, or would she know again the love she had lost, the tenderness she had tasted; and times there were when, amid her general passive appearance of numbness and indifference, hot, scorching tears of utter despair escaped her, and a passionate longing seized her to take to flight, whither she knew not, and to rend asunder the meshes of the marriage net that bound her now; and in this frame of mind she departed on her honeymoon!

On that morning there lingered long on one of the western batteries of the old castle an officer who—if he was noticed at all—seemed to be solely intent on enjoying a cigar, and who seemed to avoid the society of all. This was poor Evan Cameron, listening to the wedding bells in the distant spire, and well he knew for what a tragedy they were ringing; and each time their clangour came upon the wind, they seemed to find an echo in his heart. So she was married at last, and more than ever lost to him! Cards came to him in due course, and he tore them into minute fragments. Evan did all his regimental duties and daily work like a man—but as one in a dream—all that was required of him, with more than ever, if possible, strict punctilio; yet he felt himself a mere machine, without heart or soul; and had only one longing, for the time

when he might turn his back upon his native country and find himself face to face with the enemy, no matter who or where that enemy might be.

CHAPTER XXIX.—MISTRUST.

‘Now that dear Eveline is off our hands,’ said Lady Aberfeldie, ‘I cannot help thinking seriously of Allan’s affairs and those of Olive, and really some serious advice should be given to the foolish couple. Could not you——’

‘No,’ interrupted her husband ; ‘I wash my hands of lovers and their piques and plans. You have managed the matter of Eveline and Sir Paget—try your skill once more.’

‘Neither Allan nor Olive is so compliant as poor Eveline.’

‘No—poor Eveline indeed !’

‘You think of her marriage thus, now?’

‘Well, there is no denying it is rather a January-and-May style of thing ; but let us not speak of it.’

Considering that her husband had from the first given his full assent to the whole transaction, Lady Aberfeldie could not help glancing at him rather reproachfully, but she only said, ‘Olive has, of course, many admirers ; but the rumour of her engagement to Allan keeps them all at a distance.’

‘Poor Olive ! Her fortune is almost a misfortune to her.’

‘Why?’

‘She imagines it to be the attraction of everyone, rather than her own beauty.’

‘And once she conceived it to be the attraction of Allan ; but she knows better now—that he loves, or loved, her for herself alone.’

‘She has already had two peers and a baronet in her train, all drawn thither, I fear, by her money-bags alone, and young Carslogie of Ours seemed desperately smitten, too.’

‘Ours?’

‘Well, I always think of the Black Watch as “Ours”—it is force of habit—a good-looking fellow, well born, well bred, with plenty of money.’

‘Allan is his equal in all these and more ; but what he and she mean by dallying and delaying as they do, I cannot conceive.’

Allan had looked upon Olive at the recent marriage in her striking costume as a bridesmaid, and thought she had never appeared to greater advantage.

Why should she not have figured there as a bride too? What was the secret spring of this doubt and mistrust that had come between them again, and which she shrank from attempting to explain? To do her justice, she was often on the point of doing so ; but a sentiment of miserable fear of what Allan might do, think, or say, if made aware of the deep affront Holcroft was capable of inflicting upon his future wife, tied her tongue. Better would it have been a thousand times had she trusted to Allan fully and implicitly, and to the means he might put in force to procure or purchase the silence for ever of such a reptile as her tormentor. The knowledge in the minds of both, that a time for separation must inevitably come soon now, if all the rumours of war proved true, softened their emotions and drew the cousins towards each other again. The intercourse between them had, as of old, its usual charm, but was strange and constrained ; for as Allan did not attempt again the *rôle* of lover, but seemed to ‘bide his time,’ Olive felt her pride alarmed, and would often reply to him coldly, with a straightening of her slim form and a cresting up of her graceful neck and handsome head.

Time passed on ; she heard nothing of Hawke Holcroft or his threats, and the courage of Olive rose ; but it was awful to think of her name being at the mercy of such a creature, even if she were married ! Once the love that was really smouldering in the hearts of both nearly burst into a flame again.

Olive was seated in the garden at Maviswood, so deeply lost in thought that she was unaware of Allan's approach until he overhung the rustic sofa she occupied.

'A penny for your thoughts, Olive,' said he.

'The sum usually offered for what might prove a perilous secret to know.'

'Well?'

'My thoughts were of many things till your voice scattered them,' said she, twirling her sunshade on her shoulder.

'I was in hope they were of—me.'

Olive only smiled, and remained silent, while he looked into her eyes with a curiously mingled expression, which seemed to be both imploring and commanding, but she only said, 'They were *not* of you : why should they be?'

Allan drew back a pace, with a cloudy brow.

'Forgive my being playful for a moment, Olive—I shall never in this way offend you again.'

She gave him a sweet and deprecating, almost an entreating, glance; but Allan did not perceive it; his face was turned angrily and sadly from her, so her pique—ever so ready—became roused.

'Olive,' said Allan, after a pause, 'love should always be stronger than pride.'

'Of course—when love exists,' she replied, turning a shoulder from him.

'And with you, Olive, do not let it stand between us as before. If your father's will is again the cause, let me tell you once more that I refuse to have any share in that lunatic arrangement, and will not marry you on any such conditions.'

'Who is thinking or talking of marriage?' said she sarcastically, yet making an effort to restrain her tears; 'moreover, I fear that as a husband you would be very tyrannical and cruel.'

'My character in the present and the past does not bear out this, I think.'

‘Suspicious, then?’

‘Not without extreme and just reason,’ replied Allan, as his mind flashed back to the Holcroft episode.

She strove to glance at him defiantly, but, failing, smiled, though his handsome face had in it an expression of sorrow and anger.

‘Ere a month be past, Olive, an Egyptian bullet may make you every way a free woman, so far as regards your father’s will.’

‘I do not wish to be free from it,’ she was on the point of saying passionately, but controlled her speech and remained—unwisely—silent.

Allan regarded her wistfully.

‘Are injudicious reticence and a little aversion the best beginning of a true love?’ he asked.

‘Perhaps—I am no casuist,’ said she, tapping the ground with a pretty little foot impatiently.

Lovely, pouting, and wistful, her face was now turned to his with a mixture of petulance and shy reproach as she thought, ‘Oh, why does he not take me in his arms, and kiss and make a fuss with me as he used to do?’

But, repelled by her curious manner, Allan had no intention of doing any such thing, and thought her a curious enigma. So thus the chance of a complete reunion ended, and ere long the luckless Olive was to have cause for repenting most bitterly her lack of candour and perfect trust, and the force of the overweening pride which engendered mistrust in one who loved her so well.

CHAPTER XXX.—THE BLACK WATCH.

WAR with Egypt had been declared, and in the Castle of Edinburgh, as in every other fortress and barrack in the British Isles, the notes of preparation were sounding, and the Black

Watch, ever so glorious in the annals of our army, was among the regiments bound for the land where, eighty years before, it had gathered such a crop of laurels under the gallant Abercrombie, in conflict, not against a feeble horde of Egyptians, but when encountering forty thousand of the veteran infantry of France. From that day in the October of 1739 when the companies of *Freicudan Dhu*, or Black Watch (so called from their sombre-green tartans), drawn from the Munroes of Ross, the Grants of Strathspey, and the Campbells of Lochnell and Carrick, were first enrolled as a regiment on the Birks of Aberfeldie, near the southern bank of the Tay, by the gallant old Earl of Crawford, the 42nd has been second to none in peace and war, and its very name and number are rendered dear to the people of Scotland by innumerable ties of friendship and clanship, by traditions and glorious exploits in battle. In almost everything that has added strength or brilliance to the British Empire the regiment has borne a leading part, and to attempt to trace its annals would be to write the history of our wars since the days of the second George. Suffice it that the second year after the companies were constituted a regiment saw them fighting for the House of Austria against France and Bavaria, and covering the rear of that British army which was hurled from the heights of Fontenoy by the bayonets of the Irish Brigades, and where, we are told, 'the gallantry of Sir Robert Munroe of Culcairn and his Highlanders was the theme of admiration through all Britain.'

So it was with them in the old Flanders war, till 1758 saw them attacking Ticonderoga in America, where, rushing from amid the reserve, where they disdained to linger, they hewed down the dense *abatis* with their claymores, and, storming the breastworks, 'climbing up one another's shoulders, and placing their feet in the holes made in the face of the works by their swords and bayonets, no ladders having been provided,' exposed the while to a dreadful fire of cannon and musketry,

under which six hundred and forty-seven of them fell ; and hence a cry for vengeance went through the country of the clans, procuring so many recruits, and another battalion was formed, and fresh glories were won in the West India Isles, where, at Martinique and by the walls of the Moro, their pipes sent up the notes of victory.

In the fatal strife of the American revolt they were ever in the van, and the first years of the present century saw their tartans waving darkly amid the battle-smoke of Aboukir, under the shadow of Pompey's Pillar, and on the plains of Alexandria, where they cut to pieces the French Invincibles, slew six hundred and fifty of them, captured their colours, which were delivered to Major Stirling, together with the cannon they had also seized ; and ere long the mosques and towers of Grand Cairo echoed to their martial music. Who can record the brilliance of their valour in the long and glorious war of the Peninsula—that war of victories, which began on the banks of the Douro and continued to the hill of Toulouse? And, anon, their never-to-be-forgotten prowess on the plains of Waterloo, when, under Macara, they formed the flower of Picton's superb division, and where, with the Greys and Gordon Highlanders, they sent up the cry which still finds echo in every Scottish heart, the *cri de guerre* of 'Scotland for ever!' while plunging into those mighty French columns, which rolled away before their bayonets like smoke before the wind. There their total casualties were two hundred and ninety-seven of all ranks.

'They fought like heroes, and like heroes fell—an honour to the country,' to quote the War Office Record, page 145. 'On many a Highland hill, and through many a Lowland valley, long will the deeds of these brave men be fondly remembered and their fate deeply deplored. Never did a finer body of men take the field ; never did men march to battle that were destined to perform such services to their country and to obtain such immortal renown.'

But equal renown did their services win on the banks of the Alma, when old Colin Campbell led them into action, exclaiming, 'Now, men, the whole army is watching us; make me proud of my Highland Brigade!'

And reason indeed had that grand old soldier to be proud of his lads in the kilt, as they swept up the green hillsides to glory. 'The ground they had to ascend,' says an eye-witness, the author of 'Eothen,' 'was a good deal more steep and broken than the slope beneath the redoubt. In the land where those Scots were bred, there are shadows of sailing clouds shimmering up the mountain-side, and their paths are rugged and steep, yet their course is smooth, easy, and swift. Smoothly, easily, and swiftly the Black Watch seemed to glide up the hill. A few minutes before, their tartans ranged dark in the valley; now their plumes were on the crest.'

Into the dense grey masses of the Kazan column, over which towered the miraculous figure of St. Sergius, their steady volley swept like a sheet of lead; anon their line of bayonets was flashing to the charge like a hedge of steel, and a wail of despair broke from the Muscovites, who, crying that 'the Angel of Death had come,' threw away all that might impede their speed and fled.

'Then,' says the brilliant author we have quoted, 'rose the cheers of the Highland Brigade. Along the Kourgane slopes, and thence west almost home to the causeway, the hillsides were made to resound with that joyous and assuring cry, which is the natural utterance of a northern people so long as it is warlike and free.'

Their furious onset struck terror to many an Indian heart during the dark years of the Sepoy revolt; and like sweetest music their pipes were heard by that desperate and despairing band who fought for their wives and children in beleagured Lucknow; and as, of course, the old Black Watch must be in everything, they bore their share in the conquest of Coomassie,

and were the first men in the sable city, as their pipes announced to the army of Wolseley.

While on this subject, we cannot help quoting a Frenchman's estimate of the Scottish troops. In the *Moniteur du Soir* for 1868, a writer says: 'The Scottish soldiers form without distinction the cream of the British army, and the Highlander is the prototype of the excellent soldier. He has all the requisite qualities without one defect. Unluckily for Great Britain, the population of Scotland is not numerous. Saving, it is true, to the point of putting by penny after penny, the Scotsman, for all that, is honest, steadfast, and amiable in his intercourse with others, enthusiastic and proud, most chivalrous when the question is about shedding his blood. The old traditions of clanship subsist; each company is grouped round an illustrious name, and all and every man is sure to be the captain's cousin. The Highlanders have a strange sort of bravery, which partakes of French fire and English phlegm. They rush with impetuosity, they charge with vigour, but are not hurried away by anger. In the very hottest of an attack, a simple order suffices to stop them. Formed in square, you would take them for Englishmen; but in the bayonet charge you would swear they were French. For the rest they are of Celtic origin, and the blood of our fathers flows in their veins. In the eyes of the Turk, the Scots have one enormous fault—that of showing their bare legs. In *our* eyes they have but one defect, but still excessively annoying—their depraved taste for the screaming of the bagpipes. We know that the Highlanders would not get under fire (with *élan*) without being excited by their national airs being played on this discordant instrument. One of their generals having put down this piercing music, they attacked the enemy so languidly that the bagpipes had to be restored to them, and then they took the position. In a word, we repeat that the Scots are magnificent soldiers.'

We may smile at the Frenchman's idea of the pipes, for as the

old piper said of Count Flauhault when he expressed his disgust thereat, 'Maybe she heard owre muckle o' them at Waterloo.'

And now once again the Black Watch were going to the land of the sun and the desert, where Abercrombie received his death-wound while calling to them in the charge, 'My brave Highlanders, remember your country—remember your forefathers!' And these glories, with all 'the stirring memories of a thousand years, were not forgotten on that day in the August of 1882 when, under the scion of a gallant house, Cluny the younger, the regiment received its orders of readiness and began to prepare for its departure from the Castle of Edinburgh, while a mighty throb seemed to pervade the heart of the city as its hour of departure approached. All in its ranks, of course, had friends whom they sorrowed to leave—all save poor Evan Cameron; and all were impatient and full of ardour to join in the coming strife; but none, perhaps, were more impatient than he, for he had to seek forgetfulness—oblivion from his own thoughts—a refuge from his futile regrets—among other scenes for the lost love of one who could never be more to him than a tender memory now.

CHAPTER XXXI.—IN THE BELVIDERE.

SHAKSPEARE tells us that men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love. So Evan Cameron did not die, nor had he any thoughts of dying; but it seemed to his young and enthusiastic heart just then that all which made life worth living for, and all its fulness, splendour, and joy, were over and done with for him. Of the movements of the Aberfeldie family he knew nothing at that time. Allan was again on leave, and was to join the regiment on the day of its embarkation in England. Evan had a longing to see the place where he had last seen Eveline, as her lover, at Maviswood. Memories of the past days at Dundargue came vividly upon him now—of

the times when they had wandered in the leafy woods near the old castle, talking sweet nonsense, with happy hearts and laughter that came so readily; when eye spoke to eye, and hand thrilled when it touched hand with lingering pressure, and glances were exchanged that, if they meant anything, meant love. Lord Aberfeldie had been ever kind to him, and a friend of his father; he thought he would like to press the good peer's hand once more before he departed, for the regiment was going far away, to a land whence he might never return; so, as Evan was an impulsive young fellow, he repaired at once to Maviswood. He found Mr. Tappleton, the old family butler, airing his figure at the front door when he approached. Lord Aberfeldie, he was informed, was in London—his lordship was residing with Miss Raymond at Southsea, and Sir Paget was not at home.

'Sir Paget—is he living here?' asked Cameron, with a start.

'Yes, sir, for a few days.'

'And Lady—Lady——' He paused, unable to pronounce the name.

'Is also here,' replied Mr. Tappleton, knowing instantly who he meant; 'but she is out somewhere walking in the grounds.'

Evan gave the butler a couple of cards and turned away. He felt quite startled to find that Sir Paget and his bride were resident at Maviswood, and thought that he could not get away from the vicinity of the house too soon. Proceeding down the avenue, he passed a narrow, diverging path between high old holly hedges, the vista of which was closed by a belvidere, or species of pillared alcove, built upon a grassy knoll, and therein, as if in a shrine, stood Eveline. To pass was impossible. For a moment he stood rooted to the spot, and then, as one in a dream, approached her. To meet her face to face thus was like something of a dreadful shock to both now. Eveline was deadly pale and trembling, while her graceful figure looked very slight and girlish in her fresh cambric costume and gipsy hat.

At the very moment of their meeting there her mind had been full of him. How had poor Evan borne the tidings of her marriage, and with it the total destruction of their mutual wishes?—mutual hopes they had none. She had often pondered on this, and wondered how he had heard it, who had told him of it, or if he had seen it in the papers, and how he looked when the sad tidings came. Of the cruel mockery of sending him wedding-cards she knew nothing. Was he striving to forget her? perhaps learning to hate her—oh, not that—to despise her? nor that, if he knew all. But they were nothing to each other now, and never could be anything more. Anon would come other thoughts that were perilous to a young and enthusiastic girl.

Evan Cameron had given himself to her with all his heart and with all his soul, and he loved her with all the strength of both; and now—now, with another man's wedding-ring upon her finger, she felt unprepared to relinquish that love, for she could not doubt that it must still exist, though he had been cruelly and selfishly treated. And while all these thoughts had been coursing through her brain he came suddenly before her.

'I pray that he may soon forget me—poor Evan!' had been her frequent thought. 'Why should he think of me more, when he knows of my marriage, and must deem me a pitiful creature?'

Each caught their breath, each clasped their hands as if in mute misery, and the eyes of both were strained, as if the pain of recognition was mingled with the peril of the situation. Evan thought how pale and transfigured looked the soft face of his lost love!

'I knew not that you were here—I came to visit your father: we march to-morrow—and—and——'

Evan paused breathlessly, though his voice seemed to thrill with passion, and his lips, when they touched her hands—even

the hand with the obnoxious wedding-hoop—trembled and quivered like those of a girl.

‘Evan,’ she said softly, ‘Evan!’

‘My darling—my lost darling!’ broke from his lips, as he clasped her in his arms, and her slender fingers softly and tremulously caressed his dark and closely curling hair with something that was almost motherly, or sisterly, in the intensity of its tenderness.

‘Oh, Evan,’ she whispered, ‘may God watch over you, spare you, protect you, and give you some other heart to make you happy!’

It was some solace to Evan’s wounded spirit that she had been in a manner—apart from her temporary doubt of himself—forced into her marriage; that her own free-will, poor girl, had no hand in the matter. Clasped to his heart, hers was beating for some moments ‘with the wild music of recovered joy, her great dread silenced by her greater passion.’ But to what end was it all?

‘This is madness!’ exclaimed Evan, as they stood for a minute, hand clasped in hand, and gazing into each other’s eyes.

‘Madness indeed!’ moaned Eveline.

‘I am going far away, my darling, and shall never see you again. That I may find a grave in Egypt is the kindest wish you can have for me; and that you will never think but kindly of me in the time to come is my only and my dearest hope now.’

She was in his arms again—the girl, every tress of whose brown-golden hair was dear to him—every expression of whose eyes and lips, every tone of whose voice, every charm and grace of whose face and form, were graven on his inner heart; but what availed all that now?

‘You know all now—my secret, and that I was not false to you, Eveline?’ said he.

‘All,’ she replied hollowly.

‘Poor Alice could not come to my quarters in the Castle;

consequently I had to meet her somewhere—where you saw us. Poor little soul, she had no one to trust to—to confide in, save me.'

'And now——'

'She has gone back to her husband—back to my brother in India.'

'Desperate with the idea that you, Evan, had deceived me, I was blind—careless—passive in their hands, and heedless what became of me; and Sir Paget bought me of them—bought me of papa and mamma—as a slave who loathes her buyers and her slavery!' exclaimed Eveline wildly.

'Such a fate, my darling!'

'Such a fate, indeed!' she whispered through her set teeth. 'But we must part now,' she added, but without withdrawing her hands from his firm clasp.

'A parting bitter as death, Eveline.'

'And as hopeless,' she said, now sobbing heavily.

'Yet, with all its bitterness, this has been a great, an unexpected joy to see you here, to embrace you once again.'

Of one grim fact they could not be oblivious. She was another man's wife, and he had to tear himself away; to lose for ever the sight of that sweet afflicted face, the tones of that beloved voice, to long again for both, with eager eyes and ears, in the time that was to come.

'Though parted thus, Eveline, you will think of me sometimes—you will remember?'

'For ever and for ever, while my miserable life lasts, Evan.'

'My poor darling! To remember me, to be constant to me in memory, while another's wife.'

'I cannot realize that even now; still less what my life will be in the future, with you not in it.'

A long, clinging kiss and he was gone, while Eveline sank down on the stone seat within the belvidere in a state of semi-consciousness, in which she was discovered by Sir Paget.

CHAPTER XXXII.—THE ROUTE.

FEW scenes are more stirring than the departure of a regiment for the seat of war—in Scotland, perhaps, more than anywhere else, when it is the departure of a national regiment endeared to the people by historical and warlike associations, combined with those of clanship and kindred. The last toast at the mess, ere it was broken up, was ‘*Tir nam Bean, nan Glean, s nan Gaisgaich*’; and now, till more peaceful times, its magnificent and trophied mess-plate was stored away, among it that gigantic silver tripod, with its fluted bowl, weighing eighteen hundred ounces, bearing, with other mottoes, these:—*Na Tir chaisin Buardh son Eiphart 21 Mar, 1801*’ and—‘*O’Chummin Gaidhculach d’ on Freicudan Dhu, na 42 Regiment.*’

About seven in the morning the pipers of the Black Watch blew the gathering, waking the echoes of that grand old fortress, which is the focus of so much Scottish history, and from the gates of which by sword or spear the tide of war was so often rolled back in the stormy days of old; and now the sound of the pipes found a deeper echo in the hearts of the thousands who were mustering in the streets below to bid the regiment farewell, and wish it God-speed in the land it was going to. The August morning was a lovely one, and the shadows formed by the golden sunshine lay purple and deep in the glens of the Pentlands, and in the valleys and hollows spanned by the bridges of the city and overlooked by the towering edifices of its terraced streets, amid which rose every spire and pinnacle tipped with ruddy splendour. The woods and gardens were still in all their summer beauty and greenery, and the corn-fields in the distance were ripe with golden grain over all the sun-lighted landscape. Ere that corn was all gathered, many of those who came gaily forth, mustering to the sound of the pipes, were to find their graves in the sand of the Egyptian desert, where the Black Watch had gathered so

many laurels in the wars of other years. All the city was astir as it had never been since the King's Own left the same fortress for the shores of the Crimea, and the hum of the gathering thousands filled the clear air of the dewy morning. Cluny trusted in his men, and thus, on this conspicuous morning, no man failed him, and no man was absent from his place in the ranks. The bustle of departure was past; stores had been issued; the grey tropical helmet, with a little crimson hackle worn on the left side, was for a time to supersede the graceful bonnet with its black plumes; valises and haversacks had been packed; rifles and bayonets inspected; the baggage selected and forwarded; and nothing remained now but to march, after sixteen months' residence in the city of the Stuarts. Cluny had kindly given ample opportunities to his men to take leave of their friends, and it was only for a short time before their departure that the great palisaded barriers of the Castle were closed at the *tête-du-pont* against all comers and the human surge that pressed against them. At last the pipes were heard echoing under that deep archway through which millions of armed men have marched; the brass drums rang under the grim ports of the Half-Moon Battery; the barriers were rolled back, and, with dragoons clearing the way, the Black Watch, in their fighting kits, with grey helmets, white jackets, and dark-green tartans, their colours cased, and all their bayonets glittering in the sun like a rippling stream of steel, came marching down the slope, while cheers rent the air, cheers and shouts, though doubtless many a heavy heart was there, for wives and sweethearts, children and parents, alike were being left behind by those on whose faces they might never look again. Each man had on his back a valise, tin canteen, and greatcoat; his haversack and water-bottle were slung, and attached to a lanyard at his neck; each carried a large knife—like the genuine jockteleg of the days of old—and right service-like and purpose-like they all looked,

The officers, who were in blue patrol jackets, with kilt, claymore, and dirk, carried knives of the same kind, together with a haversack, field-glass, and water-bottle. Dense were the crowds occupying every street, every window and balcony, every coign of vantage, and the whole area through which the regiment marched to the sound of its national and martial music seemed instinct with life, ardour, and enthusiasm. Many veterans were in the ranks of the regiment—men who had served in Ashanti, and not a few who, as Albany Highlanders, had marched to Candahar and fought in Afghanistan. Their colonel—Cluny the younger, son of that venerable Cluny who is chief of the Macphersons or Clanvurich (the second tribe of the great Clan Chattan), and was once a Black Watchman—rode at their head, and near him marched his favourite sergeant-major, MacNeil, a tall, stately, and tried soldier, who, though he knew not the fate before him, when the hour came, had no fear of facing death as became one of the *Freicudan Dhu*.

Evan Cameron, as he marched on, claymore in hand, had a shrewd idea that among the many there, whose tender hearts were filled with pity and enthusiasm, would be one who was secretly and inexpressibly dear to himself; and yet, though a kind of mortal pain was in his breast, his heart, despite it all, beat responsive to the cadence of the old familiar march—the regimental quick-step—the same air to which he had so often trod in past times and in other lands; and now, as one in a dream, he saw the seething crowds, the forest of waving hats and handkerchiefs, and all the glorious view on which he was probably looking for the last time—the noble line of Princes Street, steeped in the morning sun, the Calton Hill with its line of towers and battlements, its temples, great stone obelisk, and reproduction of the classic Parthenon of Minerva, Arthur's Seat, and the Craigs and the old city with its ten-storey houses—each a stone record of the historic past. He was suddenly roused on

seeing Carslogie playfully kiss the basket-hilt of his claymore, and wave his hand to a young lady who sat by the side of an elderly gentleman in an open barouche. She was closely veiled, but Evan's heart leaped in his breast when he recognised Eveline—Eveline by the side of Sir Paget, who waved his hat occasionally, and jerked his bald head about as usual.

‘Why was such a girl as that, Allan Graham’s sister, sacrificed to that old devil of a fogie?’ asked one of the Black Watch of Carslogie, a high-spirited young fellow, who thought it very nice to be in the 42nd, but very nasty to be also in debt, and was now right glad to find himself *en route* for Egypt.

‘Why, indeed! you may well ask,’ he replied; ‘simply because her father is one of the upper ten, and, like all that lot, selfish to the backbone.’

And Cameron’s heart endorsed his answer to the full. Eveline saw him, and for a moment—but a moment only—raised her veil. The tale of all she had endured was written in the wistful and mournful expression of her soft hazel eyes, and all who knew her now remarked that, though she sometimes smiled, she never laughed. She felt her lips quiver and the lines of them tighten, for we may control deep emotion in the eyes, but on the mouth never. Her whole heart and soul were concentrated in the effort to appear calm and look on, though her eyes were dim with the tears in which she feared just then to indulge.

‘Oh, my darling!’ she whispered to herself, again and again, but voicelessly, in her heart. ‘My dear love—my brave Evan—I shall never see you again!’

Surreptitiously she concealed her tear-soaked handkerchief in her pocket, and drew forth another—a fresh one redolent of eau-de-Cologne. Quickly though she did it, Sir Paget saw the act, drew his own conclusions therefrom, and thought himself an ass for having accorded her permission to see the Black Watch depart. Their recent brief meeting—the memory of the

passionate kisses that should never have been given or taken—added now to the supremeness of the present moment. He only appeared to bow to her; but as he gazed with eyes of passionate yearning on her flower-like face, the lips he had kissed so often, the eyes that had so often looked with love into his, and did so now, his heart filled with a wild and desperate longing to take her to his breast and cover her face with kisses again. But the drums beat, the pipes played loud and high, the crowds cheered, and the forward march went ruthlessly on.

All this fuss of Eveline's, thought Sir Paget, could not be merely for the departure of her brother's regiment! At last to Eveline's ears the sound of pipe and drum died away in the distance as the barouche was driven homeward to Maviswood; but now the despair in her face and attitude was too palpable not to attract the attention of Sir Paget, who jerked his face forward quite close to hers and regarded her gloomily and in silence. In all that followed now, Evan Cameron seemed to act mechanically, and to do that which was his duty by mere force of habit as the regiment marched into the resounding railway station, where he saw the men of his company told off to compartments; saw the sergeants marking on the footboard of the carriages with chalk the letter of the company; saw the men take off their valises; and ere long the swift special train was sweeping through the dark tunnel that pierces the rocky bowels of Calton Hill, and the Black Watch was fairly off for Egypt again.

How to bear his loss in the long years that were to come, if the fortune of war spared him, was the thought that tortured most the mind of Cameron then, and gave him an emotion of despair. He remembered the fixed and agonized gaze of Eveline; he remembered, too, the manner in which her spouse had looked grimly on, with an angry, yet not unsatisfied, jerk of the head, as he, no doubt, was thinking they 'had seen the

last of Evan Cameron.' The future ! All that was vague to the latter indeed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—'IDIOTS ONLY WILL BE COZENED TWICE.'

It was on an August evening : the sun had not set, but the sky was cloudy and gloomy ; the wind was high, and a heavy sea was on at Spithead, and the conservatory in which Olive was lingering and selecting a button-hole of violets and maiden-hair fern for Allan was so dark already that the lamps were lighted in it. She was dressed for a dinner-party, and was looking charming—her best and brightest—as she sang softly to herself and wandered from one shelf of potted flowers to another, when Allan suddenly joined her, with an expression in his face that was full of mingled sadness and excitement, and with a telegram in his hand.

'Allan, what has happened?' she asked, changing colour, and with dire forebodings in her heart.

He caught her hands in his and tried to smile.

'Tell me, why are you so sad?' she asked again.

'Darling,' said he, as he drew her to his breast, 'compose yourself ; I have just had great news—bad news you will deem them—to tell you.'

From these few speeches it may be gathered that the cloud that hovered between this pair of lovers had passed away, and that sunshine had come again. They were at Puddicombe House, a villa of Sir Paget's, which he had lent to Lord Aberfeldie, and from the windows of which, as it overlooked Stokes Bay and Spithead from the Clarence Parade at Southsea, they could daily see the departure of great white 'troopers,' crowded with soldiers—Highlanders, Rifles, and Marines—steaming past the long line of the sea-wall (with all its naval trophies and monuments) *en route* for the shores of Egypt. There, too, were in view the three forts in the Channel, with Puckpool

Battery at Spring Vale, which, with the other in a line on the mainland, would effectually bar an enemy's ship from reaching Portsmouth Harbour. Ponderous indeed are these forts—one in particular, a mass of circular masonry, girt by a black belt of iron armour, pierced with port-holes, through which the great guns of 'the period' may spit out shot and shell; and beyond lies the peaceful Isle of Wight—a charming stretch of sloping land, wooded to the water's edge, and studded with beautiful mansions.

'You have bad news to tell me?' said Olive, as the haunting terror that was ever before her struck a pang to her heart.

'I must rejoin my regiment at once; it leaves the Castle of Edinburgh to-morrow for Egypt, and I am to meet it at Woolwich, where the transport awaits it. Oh, how hard it is to part with you—even for a time,' he added, caressing her, as her head dropped upon his breast; 'to part thus, and unmarried yet, Olive—after all our past folly, jealousies, and waste of time. Speak to me, darling!'

'What can I say, Allan?' replied Olive piteously, as her tears fell fast.

'We shall not go to this dinner-party at the Port Admiral's, of course. Our last evening must be spent together.'

'Oh, Allan, Allan!'

'Take off those evil diamonds, darling—those stones of ill-omen. Why did the *mater* let you wear them? They are never produced without something happening.'

'And the transport sails—when?'

'On Tuesday evening.'

'So soon—so very soon!'

'My darling—my own—don't weep so,' said he, pressing her closer to his breast, and nestling her face in his neck, while he caressed and tried to soothe her; but the impulsive Olive would neither be soothed nor comforted for a time.

When, however, she became calmer, he said, 'I must leave

you for a few minutes. I must telegraph to the adjutant, see the *mater*, poor soul, and send apologies, as we shall not go to the admiral's to-night.'

He left her; and, sinking into a sofa, she abandoned herself to a stormy fit of weeping and to sad and bitter reflections, and to many unavailing regrets—unavailing now, as they were to be parted so soon; and one grim and harrowing fact stood darkly out amid them all—her affianced lover was going to the seat of war and disease, to face unnumbered perils in that fatal land of Egypt! A slight sound roused her, and drew her attention to a glass door of the conservatory that opened to the garden. A man's face seemed glued against it—a face white and ghastly, apparently regarding her fixedly—the face of Hawke Holcroft, emaciated by dissipation, want, or disease—probably by all three—his shifty eyes bloodshot and wild in expression.

In another moment she would have screamed with terror; but he opened the door, entered, and stood before her.

'I never thought—at least, I was in hope never to see you again,' said Olive, starting up, and recoiling from him.

'Ha—indeed! But in this world are not those always meeting who are better far apart?' was his mocking response.

'What brings you here—what do you want?' asked Olive, gathering courage from desperation, and trembling in her soul lest Allan should return and find this villanous intruder there.

'What do I want! Money. I am, and have been for days, starving.'

'Money I shall not be weak enough to give you again, under any threat or any pressure. The last I gave you cost me dearly,' said Olive firmly, though terrified to find herself face to face with this would-be assassin again.

'You will not?'

'No.'

'Then give me these jewels—these diamonds,' he said,

hoarsely; and, ere she could move or speak, he snatched up the necklace and pendants from a pedestal on which she had placed them, and thrust them into his breast-pocket. 'For a time, now, the work of art I possess shall be withheld from the British public—but for a time only—and in the memory of the time when you loved me, or led me to believe that you did.'

'Insolent—how dare you say so?' she exclaimed.

'You tried to win my heart, and won it, too—you played with me fast and loose, as you did with your cousin, for whom you did not care one doit, then at least, and for whom I believe you care nothing now.'

Olive glanced round her in dismay, for should such words as these, and others that followed them, reach listening ears, she might be lost, and she was powerless to stay the impetuous current of his studiously mischievous speech. Moreover, she did not see what Hawke Holcroft saw behind some towering ferns and other plants—a form, with firm-set teeth and flashing eye, transported by fury, while his feet were rooted to the spot—the face of Allan Graham, who saw and overheard, yet failed to comprehend the situation!

A vindictive desire to separate the lovers if he could, and to humiliate the man he hated, took possession of the diabolical mind of Holcroft, who said, 'Let me kiss your hand, Olive, but once again, ere I leave you—I, whom you loved once so well!'

'Insolent!' exclaimed the girl impetuously.

But, ere she could resist him or escape, he threw his arms round her, pressed her to his breast, kissed her many times, and then—as Allan sprang forward—he quitted the conservatory, and vanished into the gloom outside, while, with a low wail of horror and distress at the shameful affront put upon her, Olive covered her face with her tremulous hands, and murmured, 'Oh, this is too much to endure!'

'Too much, indeed,' said a voice, as a heavy hand grasped her shoulder, and she was swung round with a force that was almost rude, to meet the white face and flaming eyes of Allan.

‘Allan!’ she exclaimed piteously, and held out her hands.

‘Stand off and touch me not,’ he cried. ‘Idiots only will be cozened twice,’ he added, unconsciously quoting Dryden.

He gave her an awful and withering glance, and, snatching up a heavy stick, he dashed into the garden after the intruder, whom he saw in the act of escaping by a gate that opened upon the common, across which he fled like a hare, pursued closely by Allan Graham, whom, as an active mountaineer and trained soldier, he was not likely to escape. The sun had set amid dim and lurid clouds; the evening was gloomy, close, and stormy; the bellowing of the ocean could be heard along the whole line of the sea-wall, from the Spur Redoubt to Southsea Castle. A heavy gale from the offing was rolling the waves in their force and fury upon the shore, where, in anticipation thereof, the boats and bathing-machines were all drawn up high and dry upon the shelving shingle. The shipping at anchor were straining on their cables, and sheet lightning, red and fiery, threw forward in black outline from time to time the undulating curves of the Isle of Wight. But Allan Graham saw none of these things; he only saw the fugitive Holcroft, who ran madly towards the sea-shore, and disappeared round the angle of the East Battery that overhangs the sea, closely followed by his infuriated pursuer.

‘What has happened, Olive—speak?’ said Lady Aberfeldie, who was completely bewildered by the condition in which she found Olive, and bitterly regretting the absence of her husband, who was then in London; and Olive, feeling now the un wisdom and futility of further concealment, told her all about the power Holcroft had wielded over her by working on her pride, shame, and fear, and how, by direct *acting*, he had too probably achieved the very end which the evil prompting of a moment had doubtless suggested—the placing of herself in a false position with Allan, and causing a hopeless quarrel and separation between them.

‘And now that he has left me thus, auntie, I shall never see him again!’ cried Olive, while, burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly. ‘I shall never forget how pallid his poor face became, and how his eyes glared with fury through their unshed tears; and never shall I forget the gaze of tenderness, astonishment, and reproach that came into them as he turned from me in bitter silence.’

‘It is very unfortunate,’ said Lady Aberfeldie, with difficulty restraining her own tears, though buoyed up by indignation at the daring and insolence of Holcroft; ‘but Allan will return in a few minutes, and I shall undertake to explain the whole affair.’

But the time passed on; hour succeeded hour, till midnight struck, and aunt and niece sat watching each other with pale and anxious faces, for there was no appearance of Allan. They supposed that in his first gust of anger he had gone to some club or hotel, and would, when in a calmer frame of mind, return on the morrow; but the morrow had passed into evening, and he returned no more! Olive felt that he and she were roughly rent asunder, and likely to drift further and further apart on the stormy sea of life. And now to account for his non-appearance. Aware that he had no mercy to expect between the hands of Allan on one side, and those of the police on the other, Hawke Holcroft thought only of escape, and, dreading flight towards the town, in the blindness of his terror or confusion he turned towards the sea, and ran along the summit of the steep, rocky, and abruptly shelving bank that is overlooked by the low earthen-works and square, squat tower of Southsea Castle.

Finding Allan close upon him, so close that he could almost hear his footsteps, amid the bellowing of the wind and booming of the sea, that rolled in white foam against the stone parapet wall, which was bordered by the narrow pathway he was compelled to pursue, he suddenly turned in blind desperation and

levelled a revolver at Allan's head, while a tiger-like fury filled his sallow visage. It snapped, hung fire, and was struck from his hand by Allan, on which he turned again and fled into the grey obscurity, whither Allan could not follow him now, as the sea with a succession of angry roars was lashing the steep stony bank, and hurling its spray over the parapet wall, while wave after wave boiled over all the path the fugitive had to pursue. Again and again he saw the miserable wretch lose his footing, while the waves tried to suck him down, and again and again, clinging with despairing energy to the edge of the stony path, he strove to recover it. A low wailing cry of despair escaped him as one wave towering higher than all the rest—perhaps a tenth wave, if there be such a thing—enveloped him in its foamy flood and sucked him furiously downward in its backwash, amid which he seemed to struggle feebly as a fly might have done.

Once or twice Allan saw his head bobbing amid the white foam, and his upthrown hands, that had nothing to clutch at, till the waves dashed him again and again, as if in wild sport, among a row of great wooden dolphins, which are placed in the shingle there to break the fury of the incoming sea, and stand up like a line of gigantic teeth, and in less than a minute Hawke Holcroft vanished from sight! Then a long breath escaped Allan.

‘The sea has done it, not I, though richly did he merit at my hands the fate he has met,’ thought he, as he hurried away to alarm the sentinels and castle guard; but all too late to succour Holcroft in any way, or even to search for his body. Darkness had set in now, the fury of the sea was increasing, and if Hawke Holcroft was found at all, it would be as a drowned man, with the fatal diamonds in his possession, when the tide ebbed and the long stretch of seaweed and shingle was left dry. But he might never be found at all, and lie, as the skeletons are still lying there among the timbers of the *Royal*

George. Allan knew that he was due with his regiment at Woolwich on the morrow, and being full of rage and bitter disappointment with disgust at the whole of this recent event—too full to have explanations with his mother, or hear aught that Olive Raymond might, as he naturally thought, be artful enough to advance, perhaps to brazen out—intent only on quitting the scene, and, if possible, of forgetting a situation so degrading and repugnant to his pride—he resolved to write to his father renouncing his cousin for ever ; and throwing himself into a cab, drove straight to the railway station, and took the first train to London. Hence it was that he returned to Puddicombe House no more.

And as the train swept clanking along the line, amid the monotony of its sound, the words of Olive's song, with what he deemed her accursed raillery underlying them, came gallingly back to his memory, with painful reiteration :

‘ I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care !
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware !
Trust her not. She is fooling thee.’

‘ And for what a wretched creature she has dared to fool me !’ he thought, while a bitter malediction hovered on his lips.

In due time, with all his comrades of the Black Watch, he found himself on board the *Nepaul*, and after she had steamed out of the Albert Dock, amid the deafening cheers of thousands, even amid all the bustle and high military enthusiasm that surrounded him, he felt half mad with grief, mortification, and fury. Night and day his mind was full of angry and bitter dreams ; a conviction of Olive's guilt and the shame of her discovery were ever before him. Brave young Allan Graham was stricken to the heart ; yet he bore himself graciously and gallantly, though a conviction grew strong in his mind that he would find his grave in the land he was going to.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—IN THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS.

ISMAILIA, by the Lake of Timsah, lay steeped in sunshine, while the regiments of the Highland Brigade, for a second time, after the lapse of eighty years, landed upon Egyptian soil again. Built equidistant from Port Said and Suez, this new town protects the outlet of the second canal, which carries the supply of fresh water from the Nile near Cairo to the Isthmus. In 1862 the place where it stands was a scene of sandy desolation. Seven years later saw a brilliant little French town in existence, with a broad quay, bordering the lake, with hotels, cafés, a theatre where vaudevilles were acted, a street of well-stocked shops, a public garden with a fountain spouting Nile water in the Place Champollion, the telegraph wires overhead, and the bells of a Christian church ringing, where, but a short time before, the wandering Bedouin, the nomadic dweller in tents, the child of the desert, with glittering spear and floating burnous, urged his camel on its solitary way from Ramses to Serapium. The heat was intense, and to the eyes of the Scottish mountaineers the scenery about Ismailia seemed intensely monotonous. Cloudless skies of the deepest and richest blue formed a contrast to the vast expanse of yellow sand that stretched far, far away till lost in hazy distance, but the desert is susceptible of many shades and changes of colour.

It is said that at Ismailia the stranger can very fully realize the purity, the balm, and beauty of the Egyptian night, especially if seated over wine and a cigar in the Hôtel des Voyageurs, where he may watch the Lake of Timsah ; and so varied are the tints of the latter in the light of the red sun setting in the west, amid the lurid glow of gold and crimson, that it looks like three lakes : towards the canal that leads to Serapium it seems a deep blue ; where the ships are grouped near Ismailia, its wavelets seem silver with gold ; while the moon comes slowly up like a silver dawn, and rosy tints yet linger when the sun has gone abruptly

down. But no time was given to the Highlanders either to study scenery or artistic effects, even if so disposed. Each regiment was rapidly formed in column—every officer and man in his fighting kit, with tropical helmet, haversack, and water-bottle; the men with their valises and greatcoats, and the march began towards the desert where the Egyptians of Arabi awaited them at Tel-el-Kebir. Little was talked of then but the recent cavalry fight at Kassassin, where our Life Guards swept the ranks of Arabi's infantry, and where a horde of wild Bedouins, who had been hovering near the field like birds of prey, after their departure, poured in to strip and rob the dead and wounded of both armies, killing all who were unable to resist. The mess, or regiment rather, as there was no mess now, saw that Allan Graham had come back a sorely changed man, who had hours of evident depression alternated by furious hilarity—not the man's old style at all; but his world, like Hamlet's, was 'out of joint.' The conduct of Olive Raymond yet remained a profound, an unexplained and exasperating mystery to him; but he felt, how bitterly, that love lives even after trust and faith are dead and buried; and now that he was so far, far away from her, dreams of a yearning and sorrowful kind, with many stinging thoughts, that he feared would never leave him, filled his mind as he marched at the head of his company towards the darkening desert. In his looks and manner, Evan Cameron, like others, read a marked yet undefinable change; his bearing now was occasionally haughty and reserved, at other times his eyes seemed strangely sad. What could have happened? Cameron did not ask, and as yet Allan said nothing about it; and, sooth to say, in his own thoughts of Eveline the former had cause to be sad enough too.

His memories were ever of the days at Dundargue, and the chance parting in the belvidere at Maviswood; and again her kisses, the touch of her little caressing hands, with her voice, came vividly to him. In some of the last papers that had

reached the transport, *via* the Continent, he could see that she was leading a life of outward gaiety. Could he doubt that it was otherwise than outward? He gathered a sombre satisfaction from the thought, and then strove to set it aside as selfish. Why should she not enjoy balls and flower-shows, races and regattas, the drawing-room at Buckingham Palace, and other brilliant gatherings? Yet as he read of these things a frown of mingled anger, sorrow, and even mockery gathered on his brow in spite of himself. In the same papers Allan could discover no trace of any body having been cast upon the beach either at Southsea or the shore of the Isle of Wight, and hence he supposed that the remains of the drowned Holcroft must have been taken out to sea.

The Highland enthusiasm, the warlike spirit that blazed up within him, kept him from a great despair, for latterly his love for Olive had become a part of his own existence. The novelty of the land in which our new campaign had opened, the incessant watchfulness, the time and attention each duty brought with it, all gave him a recklessness as to life and as to fear of death, that after a time won him the involuntary admiration of the Black Watch and the whole Highland Brigade. Just as the sun set the bugles sounded a 'halt' after a march of six miles; but six terrible miles they were, for at every step the Highlanders sank ankle-deep in the soft and sun-dried sand. All around that halting-place a sea of the latter seemed to stretch in every direction, bare and desolate, save where Ismailia lay, its edifices looking inky black, and opaque in outline against the orange and primrose sky; and black looked the masts of the transports as they rose like a forest amid the waters of the Lake of Timsah.

When the first bivouac was formed at El-Magfar, the bare-kneed Highlanders, each rolled in his blanket on the soft sand, slept comfortably enough; but with morning came the first instalment of misery, when the heavy dew that soaks everything

left them cold and stiff, and longing even for the fierce unclouded sun again.

‘A devil of a country this !’ said Carslogie. ‘By day it is too hot to eat, to act, or even to think ; and at night it is too cold to sleep or think of anything but the bitter cold itself.’

And but for the hot tea made for all over-night, when the brigade first came to its camping-place, some injury to health must have ensued ; but the men were too weary to eat even a biscuit, of which each carried a two days’ supply in the canvas haversack that formed his only pillow. Before the sun was up, Allan rose from the sand and looked about him. Under the starlight the Highland bivouac—for camp it was not—presented a curious sight, as the men lay in ranks, each rolled in his blanket, beside the piles of arms ; the sentinels of the out-piquets on the way to Tel-el-Mahuta, standing dark and motionless against the blue of the sky, looking in kilt and helmet like the statues of ancient Romans. To get a little warmth ere the pipers blew the ‘rouse,’ he walked a short distance from where the men of his company lay, and, near a fragment of ruined wall, beside which grew a patch of those prickly plants (round which hillocks of sand occasionally gather) and a solitary gum-tree grew, he found, rolled up in a burnous, and evidently concealing himself in dread and fear, a Bedouin. ‘There was a small palm-grove near Magfar ; why did he not seek hiding there ?

‘Hallo, my man,’ thought Allan, ‘what are you lurking here for ?—mischief, no doubt.’

He drew his claymore, supposing the lurker could be but a spy who had crept within our chain of sentries ; but the wild son of the desert raised his hands deprecatingly, and, opening his burnous, showed that he was perishing from a dreadful wound—a sword-cut that had laid open his right shoulder and breast. Allan put his brandy-flask to the sufferer’s lips, raising his head as he did so, and then addressed him inquiringly. Allan had

picked up some Arabic in India, and thus could understand the Bedouin, who informed him that he had been wounded thus, by one of those sons of Anak, our Life-guardsmen in the charge at Kassassin.

‘An Egyptian, by Jingo!’ exclaimed Carslogie, who came up at that moment. ‘Are you about to become a studier of humanity?’

‘Well, Cuvier was great in the study of wasps, and so forth. Why shouldn’t I study Egyptians?’ replied Allan grimly; ‘and this poor devil seems to have been wounded in the affair at Kassassin the other day.’

‘You understand him, then?’

‘Perfectly. Please bring one of the staff-surgeons quickly; he must have been lying here when we took up our ground over-night.’

The Bedouin, whose astonishment that he was not butchered on the instant was great, stared alternately at Allan and at Carslogie, who was a young fellow of the best style, one whose fine face even the hideous tropical helmet (which is such an appalling substitute for the graceful feather bonnet) could not spoil. His figure was slight and elegant, his features clearly cut and refined, and his bright brown chestnut hair was close and curly. The Bedouin was a perfect type of his race, and, save that he had a good Remington rifle slung over his back, was not much changed in habit, nature, or turn of thought from his ancestors of the tribe of Ishmael. Though weakened now by suffering and great loss of blood, he seemed spare of figure and light of limb, well formed and active, tall, but whether thirty or forty years old it was impossible to say. He had a long, thin, and expressive countenance, with glittering black eyes and teeth of pearly whiteness. His colour was a dusky brown; his hair black and wiry. He was evidently a Bedouin of the desert, as the two ends of the scarlet shawl which formed his turban hung down upon the shoulder, to distinguish him

from the Arabs of other tribes. He was clad in a thick dark brown baracan of wool, which served as a dress by day and a bed by night, over which was a robe with wide sleeves.

When the doctor was dressing his wound, which was certainly a terrible sword-cut, his richly embroidered girdle was seen, and this announced him to be a sheikh, and such he was proved to be, as Allan gathered from him that his name was Zeid el Ourdeh, the sheikh of a tribe near Jebel Dimeshk, between the desert and the disused rail to Heliopolis, 'the City of the Sun'; and as he lay there in his picturesque costume, with a group of wondering Highlanders, in their dark kilts and white helmets, gathered round him, and the blood-red sun in the distance, coming swiftly up out of the dry sand of the yellow desert, as it seemed, Allan thought what a subject was the whole for the pencil of an artist. The Bedouin was on the point of fainting, so great was the agony occasioned by the dressing of his wound; but a mouthful from Allan's flask revived him more than it would have done one usually accustomed to such stimulants.

'Some sick men are going back to the rear at Ismailia,' said Allan. 'Carslogie, please to order the ambulance people to come this way. I'll send this unfortunate creature to the Third Field Hospital.'

Carslogie paused to scrape a vesta and light a cigar, which he proceeded to puff with a sigh of satisfaction.

'Quick, Carslogie,' cried Allan. 'We have no time to lose. The bugles will sound immediately.'

And Carslogie went on his way with the air of a man who thought the world would be none the worse for having a Bedouin the less in it. In his own language, and in terms peculiarly his own, Allan could make out that the sheikh was thanking him in a low and earnest voice, and adding that while life lasted he 'would always deem him as a brother. You infidels are powerful as the genii of old; you can flash a light

at night brilliant as that of the sun at noon; you have another light that springs from the unseen air. I have seen it in the streets of Cairo' (no doubt referring to gas); 'and you can send your thoughts from land to land under the sea more swiftly than even the Afrite did in the days of Solomon; and I fear that from your hands the Egyptians will suffer such chastisement as fell on the people of Noah, of Ad, and of Thamud,' he added wearily and sadly, as his head fell on one side. A party of the ambulance had now come, and Allan informed him that he was to be sent to Ismailia. He did more; he placed some money in his hand wherewith to procure necessities, and, while the eyes of the Bedouin gleamed with gratitude, his brown mahogany and attenuated fingers closed avariciously and tightly on such an unusual gift as coins.

'Pon my soul, Allan Graham,' said Carslogie, 'considering how these rascals treated our wounded at Kassassin, your humanity, to say the least of it, seems to me to be a little misplaced.'

'Perhaps; but I cannot help it. I feel a little tender-hearted just now,' said Allan, with a smile, as the wounded Bedouin—of whom he had not seen the last—was borne away.

The pipes struck up, and once more the columns began a ten-miles' march to Mahsameh. The Gordon Highlanders were in advance, the Camerons next, then came the Highland Light Infantry, and then the Black Watch, all toiling through the soft, deep sand. These splendid regiments were all marching in massed columns, at one pace interval, the cavalry moving with them collaterally on one flank, and the artillery on the other, clattering along, with sponges, buckets, spare wheels, and forge waggons—all forming a grand, impressive spectacle in the midst of the wide Egyptian desert. To Scottish soldiers, who are usually so well grounded in their Bible history, the soil they were treading, if the toil made it disgusting on one hand, memory made it full of deep interest on the other.

They knew that they were already in, or were approaching, the Land of Goshen, where, by the tasks they had conned at school and those which their ministers superintended, they were aware that they were nigh unto the place where Jacob dwelt of old, that he might be near to Joseph, who lived at Pharaoh's court ; near to the place where father and son met, and where we still find Rameses, which was built by the Israelites in the days of their bondage ; and, as our soldiers marched on, some there were who recalled these things to each other, as their minds went back to the village kirk, whose bells awoke the echoes of green and lonely glens, and to the firesides of their fathers, when expounding on these things on Saturday night, when the 'big ha' Bible' was produced ; and, though they might yawn wearily over such matters at home, these Scriptural names and localities had a very different effect upon them now.

CHAPTER XXXV.—THE MARCH THROUGH GOSHEN.

ON, and on, and on, through the same kind of Egyptian landscape—tame, barren, and insipid—so terribly vapid and flatly horrid, when compared with the Salvatoresque hills and glens of their native land—the naked plain, bounded by occasional hillocks at vast distances—the toilsome march of the Highlanders continued. Yet there are luxuriant plains in some parts of the Land of Goshen. Sometimes date-trees were seen, with trunks bare and slender, or mud-walled wigwams on the causeways ; but it is a land that, with all its vast antiquity and religious associations, of which no poet has ever sung. 'What, indeed, could an Egyptian sing on the reed of Gesner or Theocritus?' asks Volney. 'He sees neither limpid streams, nor verdant lawns, nor solitary caves ; and is equally a stranger to valleys, mountain-sides, and impending rocks.' Miss Martineau is almost the only traveller who claims for Egypt the

attributes of the picturesque and varied in beauty! And there were incessant swarms of scorpions, gnats, and more especially of flies—one of the many plagues of Egypt—which were so numerous that it was impossible to eat the dry ration biscuits without the chance of swallowing these pests also.

More than once, on the summit of a sandy hillock, there would appear, sharply defined against the clear blue sky, the picturesque figure of a mounted Bedouin, with his white burnous floating about him, a tall, reed-like spear, or a long musket slung by his side—a man unchanged in aspect or ideas from his nomadic forefathers, who saw the mailed Crusaders toiling on their way to Jerusalem—gazing with stolid wonder at the marching columns in a costume so strange, with bare knees, white sporrans, and kilts of dark-green tartan waving at every step; while on the hot and breathless air there was borne towards him the hoarse and shrill music of the pipes—the same wild music that, eighty years before, woke the echoes of the Pyramids and of the streets of Grand Cairo.

But what land in the world has not echoed to their music? All our soldiers were more or less full of enthusiasm—anxious to get at Arabi—to grapple with the enemy, ‘and get the business over,’ as they phrased it; though it is doubtful if they quite believed in Sir Garnet Wolseley’s apparently boastful prediction that the war would be ended by the 16th of that month, September.

In the exuberance of their spirits, many chorused merrily when the pipes ceased, which was seldom, lilting as, a writer says, only ‘the song-loving Scots’ can do, as in the days when their country was redolent of song, when the milkmaid sang some old chant to her cows in field or byre, when the housewife span at her ingle-neuk, when the reapers filled the harvest-field with melody, and the ploughman in winter when he turned the glistening furrows over the lea. And now and anon the Bedouin scouts would wheel their horses round and vanish

ere our cavalry could reach them, to bear to Tel-el-Kebir the terrible tidings, as some said, 'that devils in petticoats' were coming, and, as others asserted, 'devils with beards down to their knees.' Every man had one hundred rounds of ball-cartridge and his bottle filled with water from the Canal, called by the soldiers jocularly 'Egyptian soup,' from its hue and quality; thus a ration of rum, when it was served out, proved very acceptable, though some there were who did not much affect the cold tea, and Allan could not help smiling at a little argument that ensued between Corporal MacSnish of his company and one of the Scripture-readers, who, to their honour be it said, kept up with the troops, went under fire with them, and after the conflict did all in their power to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded.

'Don't grumble, corporal,' said the Scripture-reader, 'though I know it is a soldier's privilege. He who paints the lilies of the field and feeds the sparrow will supply all you want.'

'Oich, I hope so, whateffer; but a corporal of the Black Watch is worth a good many sparrows, I can tell you, and as for the cold tea—ugh!'

'Better for you than all the liquor in the world, my man,' said the Scripture-reader.

'Even the worst whusky, whateffer, would be better to my mind; and we have Scripture for it that we should not drink water alone.'

'Indeed!' said the reader doubtfully.

'Yes,' urged the corporal, who knew his Bible well; 'are we not told in Maccabees, chapter xv. and verse 39, that "it is hurtful to drink wine or water alone, as wine mingled with water is pleasant and delighteth the taste"?'

'For all that,' replied the Scripture-reader, 'I agree with Sir Garnet that water is alone the drink for man.'

'Yet the only man that Holy Writ records as ever asking for it, didn't get it.'

‘Who was *he*?’

‘Dives, and we all know where *he* was then. Scripture again!’ said the corporal, with a smirk on his sharp Highland face, and thinking he had decidedly the best of the argument.

During a mid-day halt on this march, some of the troops constructed out of blankets and rifles with fixed bayonets erections like gipsy tents, to shelter them from the blazing heat of the sun, and a singular kind of encampment they presented. With ship biscuits and tinned meat and some brandy to flavour their cold tea, Allan Graham, Cameron, Carslogie, and some other officers of the corps made themselves as comfortable as they could under shelter of their impromptu tents, and many were even jolly, especially Carslogie, who was rather a noisy and irrepressible fellow. Stretched on the sand with his tropical helmet tilted back on his head, he drank his ‘cold tea,’ as he called it, though it was stiff half-and-half grog, and proffered his cigar-case to all.

‘Isn’t this jolly!’ he exclaimed. ‘Instead of this, we might have been out in the blazing open.’

Then he struck up a verse of a song to the air of the ‘Garb of Old Gaul,’ and composed by an anonymous writer, though he hinted it was Mr. John Bright:—

‘They talk of a good time, when warfare shall cease,
And the nations hobnob o’er a big pipe of peace,
And the lion and the lamb in auriferous mead
On bills of exchange in beatitude feed.
But keep your powder dry, my boys, and keep your bayonets keen;
The world can’t do without us yet, nor will it soon, I ween!
Then stern and true, where work’s to do, we’ll do it as we can,
And shoulder to shoulder still march in the van!’

‘The good time predicted seems a long way off yet,’ he added, with a sigh, to find that the last of his grog was gone, for after a hot morning’s march it was, as he said, ‘quite a Sybaritish luxury.’ ‘Well, well, a little time will find us face to face with Arabi, and we shall exchange the fleshpots of Egypt for those of the old country.’

This was the 11th of September, and the march was resumed at five in the evening for the head-quarters at Kassassin, where the column found its tents pitched. Allan shared his with Cameron, and, like their comrades, they proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as they could; but it soon became known that on the morrow the Highland Brigade was to lead in the night attack upon the formidable entrenchments of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir.

‘The last bugle some of us may ever hear will sound at six to-morrow evening,’ said Allan, as he and Cameron, after a picnic kind of repast, lay on the floor of the tent and smoked their Havanas, with their jackets open, and minus collars and ties, for the evening was hot then, though cold and dew came together the moment the sun went down, and then there was no light in the tent save those of the stars.

‘Listen to Carslogie singing in his tent; no sombre reflections seem to come to him,’ said Cameron.

‘Some of us, of course, will lose the number of our mess, as the sailors say,’ said Allan again, after a pause.

‘Well, it is not a cheerful thought, Allan,’ said Cameron; ‘but life is not particularly rosy with me just now, so I am just the fellow to have a charmed one when under fire again to-morrow.’

‘There is a history in all men’s lives, Cameron, it is said. Well, there is a devil of a lot in mine—more than I care for.’

‘You have long seemed rather low in spirit.’

‘I have reason,’ replied Allan, while that inexpressible longing to talk of himself and his sorrows, which seizes upon men now and then, came upon him, and he related to Cameron the whole story of his engagement with his cousin, his doubts and fears—the intrusions and outrageous insults put upon them both by Hawke Holcroft, who seemed to wield some degrading and mysterious power once—a power that was ended now; ‘and,’ he added, after his narrative was ended, ‘I trust under heaven never to look upon her false fair face again!’

Cameron heard his strange story in silent amazement.

‘Can all this not be explained?’ he asked.

‘I want no explanation; I have been degraded enough,’ replied Allan bitterly.

Cameron, strangely enough, had never, as yet, even to his early friend and comrade, made any reference to what the latter fully knew—his love for Eveline: and never once had her name escaped him during the long voyage in the *Nepaul* from Woolwich to Ismailia, nor even on the march towards the enemy.

Poor Cameron had thought, what was the use of speaking of that matter *now*, when all was hopeless—all over, and for ever, between them? But now, encouraged or melted by Allan Graham’s new confidence in himself, he said, ‘With reference to the risks we run to-morrow, I am glad that I set my house in order, did so, indeed, before we marched from Edinburgh.’

‘How?’

‘About Stratherroch, or what remains of it.’

‘In what way, Evan?’

‘We must all die sooner or later—a soldier sooner, perhaps, than a civilian; so by will, if aught happens to me—I have left the old place—tower and hill, wood, glen, and water, to—to Eveline—I mean to Lady Paget.’

‘Good Heavens! to Eveline!’ exclaimed Allan, his face full of a surprise that was unseen in the starlight and darkened bell tent.’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you no one else?’

‘None save my brother Duncan, who has himself a large fortune—none whom I love as—as I love her,’ added Cameron, in a very broken voice.

‘Poor Evan! I always suspected—indeed, knew of it.’

‘You did?’

‘Yes, Evan.’

‘And—and your sister?’

‘She loved you.’

‘My God!—yet was sacrificed to another.’

They wrung each other’s hands in the dark, and both remained silent for a time, each full of his own thoughts, and in the gloom seeing nothing but the end of the other’s cigar.

‘Sir Paget is so rich that he will think little of Stratherroch, even when cleared of its heavy encumbrances,’ said Evan.

‘But he may think rather wrathfully of the donor, though I trust and hope he may never get it. And now, good-night, Evan. I have to parade the inlying picquet. Get some sleep if you can, old fellow—we’ll need all our metal on the morrow.’

And Allan, taking his dirk and claymore, hurried away full of thought, for, if his friend really fell, this odd bequest of Stratherroch might compromise his sister with her elderly spouse, and it was impossible to make any change, circumstanced as they were then.

‘It is said that “every man has a history, and that every man outlives it,”’ thought Allan; ‘I wonder how it will be with poor Evan and me. And now to parade the picquet, with that paragon of sergeant-majors, M’Neill. Picquets parade at sunset—here, however, the sun sets before we have time to think of it. But the fight to-morrow will be to Evan and me—for a time, at least—what opium was to De Quincey and the author of the “Ancient Mariner.” Fool, fool, fool that I am, to think of *her* here at all!’

He left Evan Cameron inspired by a mingled emotion of gratitude and satisfaction, for Evan now knew and felt certain that, had Eveline been in Allan’s gift, she might have been his bride ere this; and with this conviction in his mind he strove to court sleep, while roused ever and anon, as in India, by the wild cry of the jackal. Sir Garnet Wolseley had now come up, the brigade of Guards also, and the whole strength of the British force was concentrated at Kassassin, the place of

our cavalry victory, where our horse so gallantly charged and swept, sword in hand, through the brigades of Egyptian guns in the dark. With the next day's dawn those officers, who, like the Master of Aberfeldie, Cameron, and others, advanced beyond a palm wood that grew near the camp, could distinctly see with their field-glasses, against the bright orange tint shed on the sky by the upcoming sun, the strong earthworks of Tel-el-Kebir crowning the hillocks, and manned by more than twenty thousand regular troops—the flower of the army of Arabi, who commanded them in person; and when the sun rose higher the infantry could be seen lining the trenches, with all their serried bayonets flashing in the sunshine. Beyond these formidable earthworks the Egyptian camp could be seen in the distance spreading far away an almost unbroken line of tents, which, if they had all occupants, betokened the presence of a very great force indeed, as more than one reconnoitring officer remarked to another.

Many were full of disappointment lest there might be no fighting after all, as the preceding morning the sound of heavy firing had been heard in the *rear* of the Egyptian position, and there seemed a prospect of internal dissension facilitating a dissolution of the whole enemy's force. Others more wisely suggested that Arabi was only practising his artillery to obtain the range in case his position was turned and attacked in the rear, though some asserted that the deep booming of the guns was too steady and continuous for mere practice of that nature. The British troops had only a five days' reserve of provisions, but it was generally known that the country was rich and full of subsistence beyond the lines of Tel-el-Kebir, and that we would carry these no man under Wolseley doubted. Moreover, he had with him sixty of the finest pieces of cannon in the world. The day passed on, and evening drew nigh, the eventful day of the 12th September, when every man was prepared to 'do or die!' Higher and higher beat every heart. At six p.m. the 'fall in'

was sounded far along the lines, and quietly, as if upon parade at home, that stately soldier, M'Neill, sergeant-major of the Black Watch, paraded and posted the markers for the various companies of his corps, 'dressing' them with his usual accuracy. The orders were brief but emphatic. Perfect silence was to be maintained for the march, and, as the place was to be carried in grand old British style at the point of the bayonet, on no account was an order to load to be issued. Each man carried a hundred rounds of ball, with one day's provisions and his tin water-bottle filled with cold tea. The tents were struck, and the baggage piled for conveyance to the rear, in case of a reverse, which no man thought possible.

The blood-red sun went swiftly down westward of the point of attack beyond Zagazig, darkness fell as swiftly over the desert and the triple lines of canal that flow between both Mahsameh and Abassa, and then our army, fourteen thousand strong, including foot, horse, and artillery, began in silence the midnight march for Tel-el-Kebir, the last march as it proved to many a brave young fellow. As the regiment moved off, Allan thought of Evan Cameron's communication over-night, and an irrepressible regret and anxiety took possession of him, as he had an unaccountable presentiment that his friend was doomed to fall in the coming strife. Of himself he never thought at all.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—SUSPICION.

MANY a wife, mother, and maid watched the progress of our troops from point to point in Egypt, from the bombardment of Alexandria, with the subsequent landing, up to the last telegram which announced that the army had begun its auspicious night-march from Kassassin towards Tel-el-Kebir, but none could do so with more anxiety than had Olive Raymond and Eveline. To them and to how many loving hearts at home were the next telegrams fraught with terror and anxiety!

Olive was free to rush to the newspapers as soon as they arrived. But not so Eveline, for so suspicious of her secret interest in one who was far away had Sir Paget become, that he absolutely kept them out of her sight as much as possible ; and she had a terror in her heart that Evan Cameron might be killed in action, and, for a time, all unknown to her. Great was her craving for intelligence. She could not, like a man, go to clubs or newspaper-offices, where the latest telegrams—often false ones—were posted up ; and often nightly she went to bed with the agonizing yet unasked question on her lips, ‘ Oh, what has happened to-day in Egypt?—what is happening *now* ? ’ and she had to scan the morning papers, if at all, surreptitiously, eagerly, and feverishly, for what she did *not* want to see. How would she have suffered in the old Peninsular war time, when news and battle lists appeared in the weekly and bi-weekly journals more than a month, yea, sometimes two months, after victories were won (we had no defeats in those long-service days), and after the grass was green above the graves of our gallant dead—the men that knew how to die, but never turn their heel before a foe—when our regiments fought for the historic glory of their *number* as steadily as for king and country? Sir Paget knew the source of his young wife’s anxiety, and watched her grimly.

‘ How dull my life is with *him*, kind though he tries to be ! ’ thought the girl ; ‘ we have not a thought, feeling, or inspiration in common. When with Evan, it seemed all inspiration, and thoughts came and went so fast. He always brought bright ones to me. ’

He was her first and only love—the love that leads a girl to see only ideal perfection in the object so beloved. Their passion had been like the dream of a midsummer night, and now they were to meet never more—never more ! She recalled the words of a song he was wont to sing to the air of ‘ Rousseau’s Dream ’ :

‘ See the moon o’er cloudless Jura
Shining in the loch below ;
See the distant mountain towering
Like a pyramid of snow.

‘ Scenes of grandeur, scenes of childhood,
Scenes so dear to love and me !
When we roam by bower or wild wood,
All is lovelier when with *thee* !’

And, as she touched the piano, his voice seemed to come to her ear again.

‘Eveline !’ she would murmur dreamily, ‘he called me Eveline—his own—yes, I can hear his voice plainly now—plainly as I heard it at Dundargue, and on that last evening at Mavis-wood.’

Then her eye would fall on her wedding-ring, and a kind of shiver passed over her. She strove to read, but that was almost impossible ; her mind wandered from the story, or sometimes certain passages struck her painfully. In a novel (‘Out of Court’) one ran thus :—‘She married him ; she ceased to love him, and she died, which, on the whole, was a better fortune than generally befalls the women who make this *irretrievable* stumble on the threshold of life.’

‘Oh ! would I but die too ; but I am too young, and too strong !’ she thought bitterly. ‘Our hearts choose for us, in spite of us, and I chose Evan.’

Bound though she was to a husband beyond her years, uncongenial and, in some points, unappreciative, she could respect him, but she could never love him ; that was impossible. Her love was far away, where the shadows of the Pyramids fell on the sands of Ghizeh, and the pipes of the Black Watch sent up their wild war-notes in the desert of Goshen. She had still the companionship of Olive, who, with her aunt, Lady Aberfeldie, was lingering at Southsea.

‘Take care, Eveline,’ said the former warningly, ‘lest this useless and hopeless regret for Cameron becomes too apparent to Sir Paget.’

'I cannot help it, however wrong and sinful it may be,' she replied. 'I do my best. I let myself love him from the first moment I met him, and knew that he loved me—loved me well—before the secret escaped him. Many have admired me, but,' she added, simply and sweetly, 'no one ever spoke to me before as Evan spoke, and I gave him all the love of my heart; but to cherish it is, I grant you, hopeless now.'

'Hopeless as mine; for now Allan, I fear, loathes me, if he thinks of me at all,' said Olive.

'I am very tired, Olive,' observed the other girl, 'of trying to compel duty to triumph over sorrow.'

In her soft hazel eyes there was the expression of one who was always looking far away at some horizon unseen by others. Sir Paget was not so dull or so slow as not to perceive all this, and to draw his own deductions therefrom. A change had decidedly come over him since he detected her emotion on the day the Black Watch marched, and he had become captious, fractious, jealous, and inclined to be sneering, while watchful of every expression in her face. In the library one day she was looking at a terrestrial globe on a tall and handsome stand. She saw that, as the crow flies, the distance was two thousand five hundred miles at least to where the Black Watch were face to face with the swarthy followers of Arabi; and, stooping, she pressed her lips to Egypt in general.

'*He* is there—I here! On the globe how short the distance seems!'

'What *are* you about, Lady Puddicombe?' said a voice sharply behind her—the voice of Sir Paget, who was jerking his bald head forward most alarmingly. 'Kissing a globe!—what tomfoolery—what strange fancy is this?'

'I was only examining it,' she faltered.

'Only examining it!' he snarled; 'very closely apparently; and in what quarter did your geographical studies lie? Why, your lips were absolutely upon it.'

‘A giddiness came over me,’ replied Eveline, ashamed alike of her sudden emotion and enforced duplicity.

He eyed her viciously, and his eyes glittered dangerously.

‘At luncheon this afternoon you were more dull and *distracte* even than I have seen you before,’ said he, peering at her through his gold *pince-nez*. ‘Now, pray, what was the meaning of that? What ails you—what oppresses you?’

‘It is very wrong. I cannot help it,’ urged the girl desperately.

‘Like all the rest of the world, you were thinking of—I suppose, Egypt?’

‘I was, Sir Paget.’

‘D—n Egypt, and everyone there!’ exclaimed the baronet, coarsely and savagely. ‘What is Egypt to you, madam, in particular?’

‘My brother——’

‘Your brother—bosh, madam, bosh! Don’t think to hoodwink me. A young married lady should always make herself agreeable, especially to her husband; it is one of the first principles of good-breeding and of wifely quality.’

Eveline coloured with pain and keen annoyance at what these remarks implied; but Sir Paget, in his anger, was not disposed to content himself with them alone.

‘Kissing a globe, indeed! To my mind it is evident that you think less of your brother than of your brother’s friend—that fellow Cameron,’ he exclaimed, giving full swing to his jealousy. ‘He comes, I believe, of a decent stock enough; but that should not have encouraged him to act like the other adventurer, Holcroft, with your cousin, and dare to raise his eyes to you.’

‘A decent stock—an adventurer!’ repeated Eveline; and then, as she thought of Evan Cameron’s long line of warlike and heroic ancestors, as compared with the peculiar line of the Puddicombes, she laughed bitterly, while Sir Paget eyed her questioningly, and said:

‘It is fortunate you were separated. Well, I suppose you won’t die of a broken heart, and all that sort of thing, like the girls we see on the stage and read about in novels.’

Roused at last by these coarse taunts, Eveline said, ‘Sir Paget, I thought you were ignorant of the ways and meannesses of the fashionable world; don’t, please, adopt those of sneering and being jealous—if, indeed, that world is ever jealous, or can love enough to be so.’

And, turning away, she took refuge in a gush of tears, inspired by intense mortification, while Olive caressed and strove to soothe her.

‘An absurd old man!’ exclaimed Olive angrily; ‘a widower, too, who began life by loving and marrying another—how dare he treat you thus?’

‘Oh, Olive, how shall I ever pass all the long years before I die, and with *him*, not Evan?’

‘My darling—hush—this will never do!’ urged Olive, who became alarmed by the chance of some new *esclandre*.

‘I don’t understand all this, Lady Aberfeldie,’ said Sir Paget, greatly ruffled, when he saw that handsome and always serenely calm matron; ‘your daughter is an enigma to me,’ he added, ashamed to acknowledge what he suspected and she perfectly knew. ‘I sometimes surprise her in tears, and, if I ask the cause, she pleads a passage in a novel, or that the music made her sad. Stuff and nonsense! I should like to see the book or hear the music that would wring tears from me.’

‘Try change of scene,’ said Lady Aberfeldie.

Daily Eveline’s hazel eyes seemed to become larger and brighter, while her face grew paler, and all the delicate rose-leaf colour and complexion faded out of it. The lines of her young features, if sorrowful, were very sweet, and her eyes, if somewhat sad, seemed calm in expression now. Yet the girl had ever before her the last *haunting* look that Evan gave her as he marched past, amid the wild hurly-burly of the dense

crowd that surged around the departing Black Watch—the long, silent, and indescribable look of those who gaze their last upon the silent dead; for dead she was to him! At times, when quite alone, she would linger on her knees, in prayer for his safety, and that his days should be ever happy—often with her open Bible before her, but without looking at it, like many honest folks, as if to have it there would work a spell. Her life, as yet, was one of constant dread—the effort to hide her anxiety and sorrow, with her recent love for another, under a hollow smile. She feared even to sleep, lest in a dream the name of Evan might escape her. She would get over all this nonsense in time, her mother thought; for in time people get over everything. Sir Paget thought he would take that lady's advice, and try change of scene; and conceiving, not unwisely, that she would be infinitely better away from the military associations of Portsmouth—the incessant arrival and departure of crowded transports, the marching in and out, the bugling, drumming, and drilling daily and hourly of 'those infernal soldiers' on the grassy common between Puddicombe Villa and Southsea Castle—he resolved to take her abruptly to his house in London, though the season was long since over, the town and the Parks empty—not that the latter fact would affect Eveline in the least.

'He is taking me to London, Olive dear, away from you,' said she sadly; for with Olive alone could she commune in secret.

'He is wise. London will not be associated with Evan Cameron. You cannot think so much there as here by the seashore.'

'I shall think of him anywhere and everywhere.'

'Change of scene, faces, places, and people will do much. Try, dear, to forget.'

But poor Eveline only looked yearningly, and kissed the soft cheeks of her handsome cousin with much caressing and many tears.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—AT TEL-EL-KEBIR.

A LETTER from Allan Graham to Lady Aberfeldie proved, by its introduction, a very bitter one to Olive, and the source of many tears.

‘ Belbeis, September.

‘ MY DEAREST MOTHER,—But for Evan Cameron of Ours saving my life at the risk of his own in action two days ago, I had not been alive to write you this letter—the first I have had time to attempt since we landed.

‘ Poor Evan ! Whatever the mysterious influence was that that scoundrel Holcroft possessed over Olive is ended now, as I saw him fall into the sea, where he was drowned like a dog. I could not help him or save him, even had I been disposed to do so. Strange it is that a blackleg, a sharper, and worse—for such he became—should have been preferred by her at Dundargue to me, the companion and playmate of her childhood—her cousin, her affianced husband under her father’s will, absurd in its tenor though that document be ; and now, neither verbally nor in writing shall I ever refer to her again. My pride—if I ever had any—has indeed been humbled in the dust, and by her ! After quitting our camp on the evening before last, we moved to the sandhills above Kassassin, where we piled arms, and the men lay upon the sand or sat in groups, all chatting gaily and hopefully of the coming conflict at Tel-el-Kebir.

‘ Carslogie, who was always in wild spirits, was busy spouting Shakespeare :

“ Thus far into the bowels of the land
Have we marched on without impediment——”

and so forth, and I overheard some of our men remarking that he was “ surely *fey*,” when word was passed to stand to our arms, unpile, and advance at one in the morning. Never before, perhaps, did fourteen thousand men get under arms so quietly,

so softly. The orders were now issued in whispers, and, noiselessly as an army of phantoms, we moved off, our footfalls muffled by the soft sand. No moon was visible, but we had a clear, starlit Egyptian sky overhead. No man was permitted to speak or smoke, and our brown helmets, red serges, and dark kilts seemed to blend with the gloom.

‘If the silence of that weird, solemn, and impressive time were broken, it was by the occasional rumble of an artillery wheel or of a commissariat waggon, the clatter of a rammer or a steel scabbard against a stirrup-iron, as we advanced through the gloom, expecting every moment to hear the explosion of a musket or a shrill shout from the scattered Bedouin horsemen, who were alleged to be scouting in the vicinity—men belonging to the band of the Sheikh Zeid-el-Ourdeh. Dear mother, our Highland Brigade led the advance—thank God for the honour!—with the Indian contingent under Sir Hugh Macpherson, having the veteran Albany Highlanders as our support.

‘Ever and anon there were brief halts to enable the regiments to maintain touch on the flanks. I cannot describe the order of our advance as yet, nor would you understand it if I did so. A silence that seemed something awful reigned over the vast plain, and none save the initiated could have imagined that, formed in a species of semicircle, fourteen thousand men were approaching the enemy’s earthworks, ready to dash at them like hounds at the deer when the leash is slipped.

‘Arabi’s lines consisted of solid entrenchments, bound together with wattles, four miles in extent from flank to flank, heavily armed with cannon, and having ditches about nine feet deep. The 74th Highlanders were next the canal, opposed to the most formidable part of these works, where many of their dead are lying on their faces shoulder to shoulder, shot down in the act of charging; next them were the Cameron, the Gordon Highlanders, and then ourselves, the Black Watch, each company with its piper in the rear, ready to strike up the

onset when the time came. Every heart was swelling proudly and wildly then, with the grand conviction that every heart at home in Britain—and dearer still among our native hills—would exult in our triumph, for a triumph it was sure to be. Silently, swiftly, and noiselessly we swept forward to the attack. No word was spoken, no command given save in a whisper, and not a shot was fired, as, with fixed bayonets, we came within three hundred yards of the Egyptian batteries, and even then the soldiers of Arabi seemed unaware of our presence. Suddenly an alarm was given, and a terrific fire—a literal garland of flame—flashed along the bulwarks, a storm of lead went whistling over our helmets, and the air seemed laden with the pinging and whizzing of bullets, while cannon boomed hoarsely, and the roaring rockets screamed high in the air. The pipes struck up along the Highland line, a wild cheer burst from every man, and we advanced with a furious and headlong rush, flinging ourselves into the ditches and climbing up the scarp; all weariness after the toilsome night-march was gone; sore feet and thirst were alike forgotten.

‘And now for the first time the voices of the officers were heard: “Come on, Camerons—this way, the Gordons—forward, the Black Watch!” The marines and the Irish regiments were on the right, and bravely they went at the trenches, too; but the *first* within them were the Highlanders, and the first of these was young Donald Cameron, of the Camerons, who, as he leaped in with bayonet fixed, was shot through the head just as we carried the first line of works. The dim light of the early morning enabled the enemy now to direct their fire; for a minute or two we drew breath, poured in some file-firing, and again dashed on, while one portion of our forces that had passed between the redoubts now opened a flank fusillade, which proved too much for the Egyptians, who—all save their wretched gunners, who were chained to the cannon—fled wildly across the open, where our fire mowed them down in

hundreds, while they rent the air with cries of, "Ya Allah! ya mobarek!" ("O God! O Blessed!") Then it was that our brigadier rode up, and said to the 79th, "Well done, the Cameron men! Will not Scotland be proud of this day's work!"

'So much for our share of it. On the other flank of the works, the Horse Artillery were pouring in shell, till the Royal Irish carried them at the bayonet's point, after a regular hand-to-hand fight, in which Major Hart shot an Egyptian leader, who endeavoured to wrest away his revolver. Our troops swept over the batteries on every hand, and the enemy fled as rapidly and hopelessly as those on the other side of the Canal had fled before the Highlanders, whose costume and fury alike terrified them. Arabi, we are told, informed his people that "the Scottish soldiers were only old women"; but now they dub us demons. To hear our pipes send up their pæan of victory over the battered and corpse-strewn trenches of Tel-el-Kebir was to feel for a time that exultation of the soul which is said to be worth a long life of dull and sluggish quiet.

'The Egyptians did not present the least appearance of order, but fled, a demoralised rabble, at the top of their speed, flinging away everything that might impede their flight, and pursued by our cavalry and Horse Artillery, who mowed them down like sheep. As one battery swept past the flank of the Black Watch, the gunners brandished their swords and shouted "Scotland for ever!" and then we knew them to belong to the new division of the Scottish Artillery. To hear that cry in such a time of supreme triumph was to make one feel what those must have felt, who heard it raised by the Greys at Waterloo and by the Albany Highlanders at Kotah. The total casualties of the Highland Brigade are two hundred and twenty of all ranks. One of the first we lost was poor Carslogie, the life of the mess. He was shot by a wounded Egyptian, to whom he had just given a mouthful from his water-bottle, and I blew out the miscreant's brains. We have also to sorrow for

Our noble Serjeant-Major John M'Neill, whose tall and soldier-like figure was long a feature at the head of the column. He cut down several Egyptians with his claymore, but fell at last, pierced by three wounds. He was, we know, the sole support of a widowed mother, to whom he was tenderly attached. The fight was fought and won in the good old British fashion, with the cold steel; the breech-loader has not yet rendered the bayonet obsolete. The Guards and Highlanders made themselves at home among the tents and spoils of the Egyptians; but our soldiers, flushed with glory and fresh from conquest, no more spoke of the Gordons, the Ross-shire Buffs, or the Black Watch, but of Donald Cameron of the Camerons—the young hero from the Braes of Angus, who was the first in Tel-el-Kebir! Who could say what heroic blood was in his veins, for his name was old as the hills, when the Camerons were known as the children of the Follower of Ovi?

'I had some narrow escapes. A ball carried away the pommel of my dirk. I had a bayonet thrust through my kilt, and two shells exploded near me, covering me with sand; but I had a closer shave than that. In the rush as I led on my company, two powerful Egyptians in white uniforms, with scarlet tarbooshes, seemed to devote their energies to killing me, as an officer or prominent leader. Both attacked me with their fixed bayonets. By a circular parry of my claymore, I turned one of them aside, and ran the man through—or near—the heart. He screamed and grappled me by the throat, dragged me down amid the blood-soaked sand. So savage and powerful was his death-grip that, had he failed to strangle me, I must have perished under the bayonet of the other, whom Cameron cut down, through tarboosh and bone to the chin, and then released me. A third who came up he pistolled; and I hope Evan will get a clasp to his V.C. for this.

'The papers will, of course, tell you all the rest—how we captured the standing camp and immense stores of provisions

and plunder; how the victorious troops advanced with tremendous cheers across it to the railway station, where soon after Sir Garnet came up; and how Drury Lowe with his cavalry cut across the enemy's line of flight, killing and capturing on every hand. I know how my father, with his great love of the old Black Watch, will appreciate the story of our glory at Tel-el-Kebir; but the aspect of the place was awful after the firing ceased, and the sun came up in his morning splendour—a sight never to forget, though I have seen some terrible work in India. The dead lay about in scores and hundreds, many disembowelled by shot or shell; some with brains oozing out; others with their heads literally blown off; and some were scorched to death by their clothing becoming ignited by the flame of an exploded shell. There were wounds of every kind—by the bayonet, the rifle-butt, and sword; and many of the maimed were seen to cast aside their tarboosh and bury their head in the sand for coolness, while the cries for water were simply agonizing. I found the third Egyptian from whom Cameron's pistol had saved me. He was dying. "Turn my head towards Mecca," I heard him say faintly to a comrade who lay near him. The fellah did so, and the poor wretch passed away in peace. I saw some who died making signs of the cross, but these, of course, were Coptic Christians. Two ill omens, it is said, occurred before the conflict to chill the ardour of the Egyptians. In the fight of Kassassin a man was shot through the heart by a rifle-ball, which pierced a copy of the Koran that he carried there as a charm, and took a part of it into his body. The other was the crescent of the new moon, which encircled a star and sank with it below the horizon just before the attack, and this, being emblematic of the crescent and star, was deemed ominous of defeat and destruction.

'Arabi has fled towards Belbeis, pursued by Drury Lowe. The canal is filled with dead and dying men and horses, yet our men are fain to fill their water-bottles from it.'

This letter concluded with kindest regards and wishes to everyone he knew and loved, by name—Olive Raymond alone excepted ; and keenly and with tears she resented the omission. In hot haste Lady Aberfeldie wrote to Allan, explaining the story of Hawke Holcroft's surreptitious visits, his fancied power over Olive, and the abstraction of the unlucky diamonds ; but owing to various circumstances—the fortune of war included—the letter was a considerable time in reaching him to whom it was addressed, and some stirring events occurred in the meantime before he could reply to it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—AT GRAND CAIRO.

THE Black Watch had barely buried their dead at Tel-el-Kebir before they were sent by railway to Zagazig ; a breakdown occurred on the line, and the regiment slept for the night on the slope of the railway embankment. On reaching Zagazig, more fighting was expected ; but the Egyptians did not show face, so the Highlanders were marched to Belbeis, from whence Allan despatched the preceding letter.

Belbeis is now a little town, about forty miles from Grand Cairo, situated on the borders of the desert, famous in the Crusade of the twelfth century as the first place captured by the Saracens, and held by them as a fortified magazine for supplies, and to this day it has a trade in corn. In the same century it made a vigorous resistance to Amurath of Jerusalem, and in more modern times it was occupied by the French army to keep open the communication between Cairo and the coast. Here a junction takes place of the canals derived from different parts of the Nile. It had been reached by our cavalry on the evening of the day Tel-el-Kebir was captured, and after a slight skirmish was taken possession of by Drury Lowe.

The Black Watch was eight days at Belbeis, during which they had scarcely any other food than hard biscuits and a

small supply of tinned meat, with muddy water from the canal to wash them down with ; and as the knapsacks did not come in from Tel-el-Kebir for five days, neither officer nor private could have any change, but slept in the kilt without blanket or other covering, while nearly driven mad by mosquitoes, sand-flies, and other plagues of Egypt.

Arabi and Toulba Pasna had been taken prisoners, and nothing was spoken of now but the advance on Grand Cairo. Meantime the surrender of the Egyptian position at Kafr Dower took place. On its frowning batteries white flags in token of peace were everywhere displayed, and our troops entered without resistance. The terrible lesson taught the enemy at Tel-el-Kebir was not likely to be soon forgotten. Moreover, the firing of the Egyptian infantry was always rather defective, their Remington rifles being sighted much too high for short distances ; thus, at the long range their firing was always better than at close quarters.

From Belbeis General Lowe pushed on towards the capital, keeping on the borders of the desert. At every village he passed through, the swarthy population came pouring forth, waving white flags and declaring themselves faithful to the Khedive, while masses of flying fugitives, on seeing our cavalry overtaking them, threw down their rifles and made signs of submission. Galloping on without drawing rein, our cavalry entered Grand Cairo, after a forced march of fifty miles in thirty hours in heavy marching order, and by that act practically ended the war, and our troops had no adversaries now but the savage and plunder-loving Bedouins, who hovered and hung upon their skirts intent upon rapine and murder, as Allan Graham and some others ere long found to their cost. The advance to Cairo was headed by the Bengal Horse, led in person by Sir Hugh Macpherson, though General Lowe was in command of the whole. On the 22nd of the month the Black Watch left Belbeis for Grand Cairo, where the corps arrived in

the evening, when the last rays of the setting sun tinted with the hue of blood and saffron the water of the Nile as it wound past the islets near El Ghizeh—flushed and red, as on the evening when, in long ages past, according to Mohammedan legends, Joseph sank Jacob's marble coffin in the stream ; and it was with no ordinary emotion of admiration and interest that Allan and his comrades beheld the capital of Egypt basking in the sun ere he went down beyond the hills.

'Skirted by groves and gardens,' says a writer, 'its light airy structures seem to be based upon a mass of verdure ; long lines of buildings, white, glittering, and infinitely varied in form, rise beyond each other, and the palace and citadel, cresting a steep projection of the Mokattam ridge, conduct the eye to the vast rocky barrier which protects "the victorious city" from the blasts of the desert.' Streets of lofty and latticed houses abounding in carved balconies and florid arcades ; the mosques, with delicate domes and airy minarets, covered with tracery and arabesques ; the houses of beys and grandees ; the fortified abodes of the stern old Mamelukes, now those of Egyptian nobles, recalling in their architecture the Moorish glories of the Alhambra and the Alcazar of Cordova—a perpetual dream of the Arabian Nights. Even with night the bustle in its streets did not cease ; the coffee-houses and hotels were filled with light, and, in the warm atmosphere, teemed with outdoor life, for there all who are afoot have lanterns, and there were the tellers of Arabian tales, the Nubian singer with his mandolin, and the Egyptian magician performing such tricks as one might think the devil alone could do ; and now once again, as in the days of General Hutchison, the walls and towers of 'the Queen of Cities'—El Kahira of the fatalistic caliphs—re-echoed to the British drum and the Scottish warpipe, as the Highlanders defiled round it to their camp, where the tents were pitched outside the walls.

The soldiers were not allowed to enter the city, except on

duty or with a pass, and, as a general rule, the latter was chiefly given to sergeants. This plan did not, of course, apply to officers, thus Allan, Evan Cameron, and some others lost no time in making their way to a European hotel, where something better than the repasts they had partaken of at Belbeis and elsewhere could be procured, and where, amid a somewhat polyglot society, consisting of Greeks and Egyptians, Hungarians and Cypriotes, they supped at an open window on a balcony overlooking a street abounding with bazaars, and lanterns swinging to and fro, crowded by people and innumerable vendors of street goods—turbaned or tarbooshed—the water-seller tinkling his dishes and quoting the Koran; the sellers of melons, of cresses and lily roots, of flowers of henna, wherewith to dye the nails of copper-coloured damsels; little donkeys ambling everywhere, and now and then a huge camel swaying along; and more than once the procession of a harem returning from the evening bath—the women enveloped in black garments and veils, with masks of white linen. Amid the scenes of warfare the organ of wonder becomes blunted considerably, and thus after a time Allan, soothed by the fumes of a fragrant havana, and weary, perhaps, with the events of a long day—the entraining and detraining of the regiment, its baggage and stores, and so forth—fell sound asleep in his chair, oblivious of the clatter of voices in the large room of the hotel, and the many sounds in the street below; while Cameron, re-entering the room, idled over an album of views of Grand Cairo and its vicinity.

Allan's short sleep was a restless one, for there came before him a vivid recollection or vision of Hawke Holcroft, and his pale face, with its last expression of horror and despair, as the waves closed over it and sucked him down. A little cry that escaped him made Cameron look his way, and he saw a man, in the dim light without, regarding Allan with a fixed and hostile expression. He was clad somewhat like a European,

but wore a tarboosh with a blue tassel, and had a voluminous beard; and his eyes seemed savage and sinister in expression. It is said that there is some mysterious and magnetic force in a long and fixed stare or gaze; and there is, it is also said, 'within us some vigilant quality that is only exercised when every other faculty is at rest, that permits all ordinary sounds to pass unheeded while we sleep, but that instinctively sounds the alarm when anything unusual or fraught with danger is at hand.'

Be all that as it may, Allan suddenly awoke, and started up, and the watcher as suddenly vanished, but not before his pale and sinister face had been seen by the waker. Cameron sprang out on the balcony. There was no one there, save his comrade, and it was evident that the lurker must have passed into the hotel by some other window.

'A dream,' muttered Allan, looking rather confused, 'a dream of that wretch Holcroft. Why should his face haunt me? I did not kill him—he drowned himself; and I need have no more remorse for that affair than for pistolling the fellow who shot poor Carslogie.'

'Whether the cause of your dream or not,' said Cameron, who was too genuine a Highlander to be without a considerable spice of superstition in his nature, 'a fellow lurked beside you whose look I little liked.'

'What was his appearance?'

'Difficult to describe in the dim light, but the gleam of his eyes was sinister. Some disbanded Egyptian turned thief, most likely. But he bolted the moment I approached, and you awoke.'

'All this is a strange coincidence,' said Allan, as he lit another cigar; and they turned their steps towards the camp without the walls. 'But I am not much given to dreaming, and our work has been too hard for some time past for indulgence in long naps, yet I had a strange and creeping sense

of some evil presence near me, with a pain that was strange and intolerable.'

But Allan had not seen the last of the man with the tarboosh. Before returning from history to our narrative and the adventures of our friends, it is impossible to omit reference to the impression made on the population of Alexandria by the warlike aspect and stately bearing of the Black Watch and other Highland regiments at the review in the great square before the Abdin Palace, the official residence of the Khedive, whom our forces had now restored to place and power. To see our eighteen thousand troops go past, the palace was crowded, not only at every window, but on its flat roof, and the Viceroy's wife, who had shared all his perils, was there with her children and the closely veiled ladies of the harem. The streets were lined by multitudes of curious but stolid Egyptians, not more inclined to hiss than cheer, feeling no sense of shame for their recent defeats and humiliation, but only one of quiet amusement and desire to behold a spectacle that did not cost them a piaster. After the blue jackets, the Guards, and others had passed, the brass bands stopped, and then were heard the pipes and drums, as, led by its one-armed general, the Highland Brigade, every company steady and straight as a wall, the ranks well 'locked up,' every officer and man looking stately and graceful in his waving tartan, came on at a swinging pace, amid mutterings of *Scozzesi diabolici nudi*. Their general, Sir Archibald Alison, in honour of the occasion, wore a sprig of his native heather in his helmet. The idea had got abroad, said the *Times*, 'that the Highlanders, who bore the brunt of the fighting, who were the first in the trenches, and who suffered most severely, had been rather ungenerously ignored in official despatches. At all events, the crowd seemed disposed to grant unofficial honours, for the second cheer of the day was accorded to the Black Watch, easily distinguished by their red plumes, and led by Colonel Macpherson, also sporting the heather,'

and exciting more interest even than our brown-clad Punjabees, or the Belooches, in their black and red uniforms, tall and strapping fellows though they were; and with them came the heroes of Candahar, the Seaforth Highlanders, wearing Mackenzie tartan, covered with medals, and marching past as old Scottish soldiers can.

Then it was that the *Times* reporter heard an Italian say, '*Poveri Egiziani!* If you had only seen them before, instead of *after!*'

The Black Watch were halted for a minute or two, prior to marching back to camp, when suddenly Cameron said to Allan, in a loud whisper, 'Look—there is the fellow I saw on the hotel balcony!'

Allan turned, and, amid a crowd of Egyptians, Italians, and jabbering and gesticulating *bheesties* and *syces* (water-carriers and grass-cutters) belonging to our Indian contingent, he saw a man with a fair beard and a pallid face regarding him steadily with keen eyes and knitted brow; but, the moment he turned towards him, the stranger shrank back amid the crowd and disappeared.

'Hawke Holcroft, by Heaven!' exclaimed Cameron.

'Impossible! He is dead,' replied Allan, feeling curiously uncomfortable nevertheless.

'I would I were as sure of a thousand guineas,' said Cameron.

'One reads of such things only in romances—yet the eyes and beard were the colour of those of Holcroft.'

'Truth is always strange—"stranger than fiction," as Byron tells us.'

'Stranger, indeed, should this prove the case. But, if alive, how comes he here, and why does he seem to dog me?'

'I regarded him at first vacantly, then with indistinct recognition, and anon with certainty, though the beard and red tarboosh disguise him so much!'

Allan Graham knew not what to think. If the man referred

to was actually Holcroft, by what miracle was he then in Grand Cairo, and how was he rescued from the sea? Strange it was, indeed, that if the lurker at the hotel was he, Allan should dream of him at the moment of his appearance in the balcony.

‘There is always a skeleton in every fellow’s cupboard, and Hawke Holcroft was the skeleton in mine, poor devil!’ said Allan.

‘You are still disposed to think and speak of him in the past tense?’ observed Cameron, whose mind was made up as to his identity.

‘I cannot do otherwise, but the moment the parade is dismissed we shall make inquiries at the hotel.’

They did so, but in vain. No person of that name or appearance was known there. Instead of being put into the comfortable barracks of Kasr-el-Nil, in the city, the Highland Brigade was kept in camp while October and November crept on, and this time was not entirely a peaceable one; for in the former month the Bedouins, who were greatly puzzled with their garb, and conceived them to be the English soldiers’ wives all camped in one quarter, thought to make a dash there, and secure a few ‘moon-faces’ to embellish their tents in the desert. A body of them belonging to the band or tribe of Zeid-el-Ourdeh, the sheikh of Jebel Dimeshk, a mountain range that lies north-eastward of Grand Cairo, came swooping down upon the Highland lines with this view, and a result which very much bewildered them, for the Scottish forces turned out with rifles and fixed bayonets, and in a very few minutes more than forty amorous Bedouins bit their native dust. On several other occasions the spiteful natives amused themselves by firing at a distance among the tents at random, and one evening a bullet whistled through Allan’s tent within an inch of his head, thus necessitating some severe patrol duty. It was while encamped here that he received Lady Aberfeldie’s letter explaining the apparently false position in which the villany of Holcroft—

combined with his spite, avarice, and desperation—contrived to place Olive Raymond.

‘Look here, Evan,’ said Allan, to his *fidus Achates*, in a grumbling tone, ‘read this letter from the *mater*. I don’t know what to think of this strange story; but, without some other proofs, if she thinks we are going to kiss again with tears as the poet has it, she is very much mistaken. The *mater* says that Olive’s own unruly heart has perhaps made a shipwreck of her life, whatever that may mean. Poor girl, what a fool she was not to confide more completely in me!’

In his tone tenderness was blended with bitterness and regret. From this little speech Cameron was hopeful that all would come right in the end; but a short time was given them to think or talk over the matter, as both were hurriedly sent with a detachment consisting of about half a company—Allan, of course, in command—to a place called Matarieh, near Helio-polis, to take part there in a demonstration against the prowling Bedouins among the mountain ranges that overlook the desert traversed by the disused railway that ran from Cairo towards the plain of Muggreh. And for this place, which lies some miles north-east of Cairo, they marched accordingly, taking with them provisions, ammunition, and tents, for the modern village was a small one, situated among the ruins of the ancient town, which was deserted far back as the days of Strabo, and is now to be traced only in extensive mounds of earth, and a noble obelisk, nearly seventy feet in height; and there disasters occurred which Allan Graham was fated never to forget.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—THE TELEGRAM.

‘By Jingo, there is old Pudd’s carriage at the door, and his wife in it—a deuced fine girl, a stunning girl indeed!’

‘Queer time this to bring her up to London, when there is not a soul in town.’

‘Perhaps that is the very reason he has done so.’

‘I’ll invite old Pudd down to the cub-hunting, and, if he brings her with him, won’t I improve the shining hour!’

The speakers were two very *blasé* but good-looking young men, who were lounging in the bay window of the otherwise empty room of a stately club-house overlooking Pall Mall, then lonely, dusty, rather sun-baked, and the chief figures in which were the sentinels of the Guards at the War Office and Marlborough House, and who, with no small interest, had seen Sir Paget Puddicombe’s open carriage drop him at the door, where he waved his hand to Eveline, as she drove away to shop or go round the Park. Now, Sir Harry Hurdell, a sporting baronet well known on the turf and at Tattersall’s, and his chief chum, Mr. Pyke Poole, a famous hand at billiards, more skilled with the cue than any marker in London, were not Sir Paget’s style of men, for both were horsey, fast, given to gambling and loose living, but both were anxious to stand in the good graces of one who, as they phrased it, ‘was proprietor of such a devilish handsome girl.’

They had not seen him since his marriage, on which both complimented and congratulated him in such well-chosen terms that he felt quite flattered, and his heart warmed to them. It flashed upon him that by the society of other young men it was possible to neutralize—if he did nothing more—the recollection of Evan Cameron in the mind of Eveline, and thus it was that he said, ‘We are quite alone in town, but will you dine with us to-day?’

‘With pleasure—delighted—charmed to be introduced to Lady Puddicombe,’ said Sir Harry, with a swift glance at his friend Poole.

‘Sharp eight, then. I dare say our *chef* will not fail us.’

‘All right.’

‘Good-morning,’ and away he went.

The friends looked at each other, each with an eye half closed, and then laughed heartily.

‘I’ll have him down at the Hall for the cub-hunting,’ said Sir Harry, ‘and have other sport than that. She’ll soon get tired of her fogie—is bound to do so. What young girl could tolerate such an old pump, and why shouldn’t I go in and win at a canter?’

‘Hawke Holcroft knew her people, didn’t he?’

‘Yes—before he came a cropper altogether. When last I heard of him he was actually a visitor at their place, Aberfeldie, wherever that may be.’

Eveline heard with total indifference that they were to have guests that evening, and with all his admiration of her Sir Paget thought, ‘What a fool I was to marry her, knowing or suspecting what I did—that she loved that fellow—loved him first (me she never loved at all) and last, and loves him now, no doubt. They say no woman ever forgets her first love, simply because he *was* her first. Pleasant for me!’

Like the hero of a recent novel, ‘he could not forget that his wife had loved another man better than she ever loved or even pretended to love him. It was her *candour* he felt most keenly. Had she been willing to play the hypocrite, to pretend a little, he would have been much better pleased.’

She loved Evan still; but it was with a love purified of every sensuous thought, of every earthly hope. To Sir Paget the story of how Allan’s life had been saved at Tel-el-Kebir by Cameron was a source of profound irritation, annoyance, and mortification, as he knew but too well how the event must enhance the latter in the estimation of Eveline, in whose heart gratitude and admiration for high courage would now be added to love. He would rather have heard that the two friends had been shot down together. With all her secret love for Evan, she was too wise and modest to desire ever to be face to face with him again. She felt that they had parted in the belvidere at Maviswood never to meet again; that henceforward he was as if dead to her; but it was a delicious privilege to hear of

him and of his bravery, and that her dear brother owed his life to Evan's courage and Evan's sword. She felt that a change had come over the tenor of Sir Paget's ways of late, more especially since the episode of Tel-el-Kebir.

Not a day—scarcely an hour—passed over her head in which she was not made to feel keenly the utter want of sympathy that existed between herself and the man to whom she had been married by her parents—sold by them—as in the bitterness of her heart she thought it. He said sharp things to her, and made bitter asides when Egypt or the war there was casually mentioned, as, of course, it constantly was; he shot many a poisoned arrow; but Eveline never blushed, though she felt a calm, cold scorn at the cruelty and injustice of such conduct. So here were a couple bound together by the strongest of all legal ties, yet utterly unsuited to each other by age, thought, and habits; yet most punctilious was poor Eveline in the performance of every wifely duty she owed her captious old man; but a sickly dread of coming sorrow pervaded the girl's mind every morning she quitted her pillow, and it came sharply and surely at last. To dare to look at a newspaper was sufficient to worry him.

'So, so,' he would say; 'thus it is—is it? Egypt and the Black Watch. D—n the Black Watch, I say! Where is the affection that you as a good woman——'

'I am only a girl,' she urged piteously.

'As a good woman, say I, should feel for her husband after marriage, even if she felt none of it for him before that little ceremony—for little and trivial doubtless it may appear to you, madam—and your regard for me should be all the deeper and more lasting than no vain protestations preceded it.'

Eveline made no response, but resumed her occupation of gazing listlessly from the back window of the drawing-room into one of those dull and flowerless London gardens which a writer has truly described as looking 'like a burial-place without any graves'; so Sir Paget returned to the charge.

‘It is said, when love fails to beget love, it often engenders hatred. Is it so, madam?’

‘Not in our case, I hope,’ said Eveline wearily, as she sighed, and her slender foot in its satin shoe began to tap the carpet with nervous impatience. ‘Why did you marry me—buy me from papa?’ she asked, with a tone and bearing a little unusual in her, she was ever so gentle and meek.

‘I married you because I admired your beauty, and believed in the love that would come after marriage—the love that is grounded not on childish fancy, but on tried friendship and esteem.’

‘Then you believed in too much,’ said Eveline, driven desperate.

‘Too much?’ he repeated, changing colour, and jerking his head forward.

‘Yes, Sir Paget.’

‘Indeed! I asked you to be my wife in full assurance that I should never find my confidence in you misplaced.’

‘You asked mamma rather, and your confidence has *not* been misplaced.’

Then she paused and coloured deeply for the first time, as she recalled that painful and passionate interview in the belvedere at Maviswood, and Evan Cameron’s farewell glance—two episodes that seemed to have happened years ago.

Thus had a life of jealousy and ‘nagging’ begun for poor Eveline—a life that was ere long to become almost insupportable—for the most trivial matter was liable to misconstruction, or to excite suspicion. If her eye followed a soldier in the street, which, as the daughter of a line of soldiers, was in her not unnatural; if she ventured to speak of the news of the day, or glance at a public journal, he watched her; it was ‘Egypt again!’ that she was thinking about; and, sooth to say, in that suspicion he was not far wrong.

Punctually a few minutes before eight, Sir Harry Hurdell

and his friend Mr. Pyke Poole were ushered into the drawing-room, and she received them with as much sweetness, ease, and grace as if no gloomy conversation had preceded their appearance, and she and Sir Paget billed and cooed from hour to hour. Fresh from the clever hands of Clairette her toilet was perfection, and her appearance excited the admiration of her husband's friends, who were both connoisseurs of female beauty, and disposed to be all the more appreciative that the husband was, as they thought, 'such a devil of a fogie.'

'I mean to have Sir Paget down at my place for a little cub-hunting,' said Sir Harry, glancing in a mirror at his accurately parted fair hair and pointed moustache; 'and, if so, I hope you will accompany him. My sister Lucretia will make you most welcome, Lady Puddicombe.'

Ere Eveline could respond, Sir Paget warmly accepted for both, again believing much in change of scene and change of society.

'I can mount you to perfection, Sir Paget, or you may send down your own horses,' said Sir Harry, his eyes wandering in secret admiration over the fair face, the soft, hazel eyes, and delicate contour of Eveline's head, neck, and little white ears.

Sir Paget thought he would prefer his own. Strange horses had often tricks that might prove troublesome to a cavalier of his years and proportions, and it was carried that the first week of October was to find him and Lady Puddicombe at Hurdell Hall. But Sir Paget could little foresee the terrible and startling events to which the apparently simple acceptance of a hospitable invitation was to lead.

'You have just come from the club, I presume?' said Sir Paget to his brother baronet.

'Yes; just waited to see the last telegrams in the reading-room.'

'Anything fresh from Egypt?' lisped Mr. Poole, with his glass wedged in his eye.

‘Only a single telegram, which, by the way, must interest *you*, Lady Puddicombe,’ said Sir Harry, with a most serious inflection of his voice.

‘Me—how?’ faltered Eveline, feeling herself grow paler, if possible, than she really was.

‘It refers to your brother.’

‘My brother!’

She was pale to her quivering lips now.

‘Yes; it states that an officer of the Black Watch had been killed in action with the Bedouins, and was buried in the sand of the desert by his friend, the Master of Aberfeldie.’

‘And the officer’s name?’ said Sir Paget icily.

‘Was Evan Cameron.’

‘Cameron!’ repeated the dry lips of Eveline, who suddenly felt as one in a dreadful dream.

Dead and buried; buried in the sand of the Egyptian desert! Did she hear aright—was this happening to herself or to some one else? She made an effort to speak, but her tongue had lost its power.

‘Eveline,’ she heard her husband say, ‘your wits have gone wool-gathering.’

‘I beg your pardon, Sir Paget. What is it?’ she asked faintly.

‘*Sir!* Can’t you call me Paget?’ said he; and the two guests exchanged glances, as much as to say, ‘What is up now?’

At that moment the dinner-gong sounded, and giddily and mechanically she took the proffered arm of Sir Harry. Never while her life lasted would Eveline forget the grotesque horror of that little dinner, with the solemn servants in attendance, and all its splendid yet, to her, sickening details and talk, the references to marriages and races—hurdle, steeple, and others—on the tapis, of flirtations and gossip—how terrible, how ghastly they all sounded to her, who felt as if in a mist, out of

which their voices seemed to come hollowly, and from a vast distance, and she was compelled to listen with one face—a dead face—coming out of that mist before her !

CHAPTER XL.—DEAD, AND BURIED IN THE SAND.

How she acquitted herself as hostess, how she got through that dinner with its many entrées and courses, from the soup to the fruit, she never knew. It passed like a phantasmagoria—a dreadful dream—but it was over at last ; and, as one in a dream, while Sir Harry held open the door for her, she passed from the table, not to the drawing-room, as he naturally thought, and where he meant speedily to join her, but swiftly to rush to her dressing-closet, to tear off her ornaments, and fling herself-despairingly upon a couch. She recalled her strong but daily presentiment that something was about to happen, though now the war in Egypt was virtually over, and that terrible something had happened at last. Could the telegram have been a mistake? Improbable and impossible! Though brief, it seemed too distinct in its grim details. She felt as if suffocating with grief, and her brain reeled at the feeble prospect of concealing it from the already exasperated Sir Paget.

She recalled Evan's words when he parted with her at Maviswood, and how prophetic they seemed now, 'I am going far away, my darling, and shall never see you again. That I may find a grave in Egypt is the kindest wish you can have for me.'

And now he had found that grave, and he was buried by the hands of her brother Allan, not on the sunny slope of a dear highland hill, or in the grassy glen where his forefathers lay in Stratherroch, within sound of the waves of Lochiel, where the summer breezes and the summer birds would be about his tomb, and the clouds and shadows of a Scottish sky flit over it, but in the desolate sand of cruel and barren Egypt! There had been no solemn ceremony by his grave ; he had not even

a coffin, perhaps, but was buried, as she had read of others being buried, in a blanket only, and there to lie in the wilderness, traversed by the antelope and jackal, till the last trumpet sounded. She remembered his song at Dundargue. Could it be that the manly and bright young face, the love-lit eyes, were dulled by death now, and that his fresh gay voice was hushed for ever?

‘Dead!’ wailed the girl in her heart. ‘Oh, God, that he might be raised up as Lazarus was, even though we should never, never cross each other’s paths again! My love—oh, my love!’ she murmured, in a hushed voice, as if the walls might hear her.

‘Only to the dead,’ says the author of ‘Mount Royal,’ ‘to the utterly lost and gone, is given this supreme passion—love sublimated to despair. From the living there is always something kept back, something saved and garnered for an after-gift, some reserve in the mind or heart of the giver; but to the dead love gives all—with a wild self-abandonment which knows no restraint or measure.’

She had felt at first a dull, vague sensation, which became an acute pang when certainty came upon her; but she dared not as yet shed a tear. Henceforward, as before, she had a part to act—that of indifference. If possible, there must be no pallid face shown, no haggard eyes; no telltale sighs must betray the agony of heart—the great sorrow that consumed her for the loss of her dead love; and wonderingly she looked at her white and already worn countenance in her mirror. Oh, that Allan were returned! from him she would know all. Allan knew the secret of her heart, sympathized with it, and would relate everything; but she could not divest herself of an awful and haunting fancy that this tragedy—beyond the chances of military life—was her fault; and that, in the recklessness and despair of his heart, Evan Cameron had risked his life too rashly and lost it. When this conviction came upon her, tears

streamed down her cheeks—hot salt tears—which she made no effort to restrain; and on suddenly discovering her thus—after the departure of his guests, Sir Harry Hurdell and Mr. Poole—Sir Paget felt his soul stung with jealous fury. He regarded her sternly rather than lovingly, and puffed out his chest with what he deemed an air of offended dignity. Yet he attempted to take her hand.

‘Do not touch me,’ said Eveline imploringly; ‘at least not just—just now.’

‘Upon my word, madam! Do you understand what your romantic pity for this—this person implies?’ he asked grimly, while polishing his bald head with his handkerchief till it shone like a billiard ball.

‘He has no father or mother—no sister to weep for him—none but myself to sorrow for him.’

‘Well?’

‘And he died like a gentleman, upholding the honour of Queen and country, and the name of Cameron,’ said Eveline, a little defiantly.

‘Bosh! I suppose he was paid for all this? But enough of this. May I ask, have you no home interests and home ties like other married women?’

Eveline made no reply; so, with a violent jerk of his head, Sir Paget spoke again.

‘Listen to me, Lady Puddicombe.’

‘I am doing so.’

‘To me you seem like one of those oddities or evil spirits one reads of only in novels.’

‘How?’

‘Having had a romance in your life, or fancying you had one, and believing you have married the wrong man, and all that sort of stuff, you like to live and brood on a memory. Is it so, Lady Puddicombe? Answer me—did you actually love this fellow, Cameron?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, wincing, as he laid his coarse hand rather roughly on her delicate shoulder.

‘Indeed. And you love him still?’

‘He is dead—he is dead—and perhaps it is a sin to brood over the past.’

‘An infernal futility, at all events. All this is pleasant for me, madam,’ said he, applying himself to polishing his pate again.

A wiser man might have partly ignored the affair, in the hope that it must in time pass away; but her unmistakable emotion of grief for Cameron’s death proved somewhat beyond the patience of Sir Paget, who recurred to it warmly.

‘His demise, if untimely, is very natural; to face death and meet it was the trade he chose, and for which the country paid him, and well, too, as we shall find by next year’s income-tax. What more would you have? Others quite as good as he—better perhaps—have fallen in this grotesque war, which, the Ministry tell us, is no war at all, though it will be deuced expensive work to us who have to stump-up for it,’ he continued, waving his hand as he had done when addressing the same words to his constituents at Slough-cum-Sloggit. ‘Moreover, madam, we can only die once, which is just as well. Who is it that likens the race of man to leaves on the trees?’

‘But the leaves fall in autumn, not as he has done—my—my——’

‘Love?’ he suggested, with a gloomy sneer.

‘No,’ replied Eveline, quivering with anger.

‘What then, madam?’

‘My dear friend—my brother’s comrade, and the saver of his life at Tel-el-Kebir.’

For some days the matter was not referred to; Sir Paget sulked a good deal, and dined often with his friend Hurdell at the club, while Eveline, in her dumb grief, felt like some piece of strange machinery that must go through the evolutions for

which it was framed. To Sir Paget she was an enraging enigma. Dead or alive, what was this Highland fellow now to her? But 'who,' asks a writer, 'in middle age, when the sordid cares of every-day life are paramount, can comprehend the young heart's passionate mystery—the love which, like some bright tropical flower, buds and blooms in a single day—the love which is more than fancy?'

But a fresh impetus was given to Sir Paget's jealous anger, and a keen edge put upon it, when a letter addressed to 'Lady Puddicombe' arrived one morning from Messrs. Horning and Tailzie, W.S., Edinburgh, anent 'the will of the late Evan Cameron, Esq., of Stratherroch,' informing her that by that document he had bequeathed his estate of that name to her and her heirs, whom failing, to those of his brother Duncan. The letter then proceeded to detail the encumbrances on the estate, which was rapidly freeing itself; that besides so much arable land there was fine grouse-shooting, extending to about eight thousand acres, yielding in favourable seasons about nine hundred brace of birds, besides black-game, snipe, ducks, and plover; that there was excellent trout-fishing in the river Erroch. It then described the mansion-house, stables, kennels, and so forth, and wound up by asking for 'her ladyship's instructions.' There was a postscript, saying that 'the late Stratherroch seems to have been a prime favourite with the crofters on the estate, and they all deplore his untimely end, even with tears.'

'Oh, what does it all mean?' sighed Eveline, in utter anguish and bewilderment. The 'late'—how horrid—how awful did that single word look, when she recalled the yearning eyes, the farewell glance, of Evan Cameron, as he marched past her on the departing day.

Transported with anger, Sir Paget snatched the letter from her hand, and, adjusting his gold *pince-nez* on his nose, focused the lines and glared at them; and after he had read he tossed it from him.

‘An insult, by Jove, Lady Puddicombe—a deliberate insult!’

‘Sir Paget,’ began Eveline, but paused; she knew not what to urge or say, though she knew but too well all the bequest implied.

‘Who wants his dirty acres of Highland bog and rock? Not I—the presumptuous fellow!’

‘Presumptuous!’ repeated Eveline, with a bitter smile, as she thought of the antecedents of the baronet of Slough-cum-Sloggit. ‘Cameron’s descent is as old as the hills; his ancestors have hunted with James V., and in battle were the comrades of Montrose and Dundee.’

‘What the devil is all this to me—or to *you*, for the matter of that?’ snarled Sir Paget, puffing out his chest. ‘I am at liberty to reject this bequest on my own part.’

‘But not on mine,’ replied Eveline, quietly yet firmly.

‘The deuce—you will accept it?’

‘Why should not I—if I do injustice to none?’

‘And degrade yourself in the eyes of the world!’

‘How, Sir Paget?’

‘What was this man to you? every man will naturally inquire.’

‘None can know that he was ever even a friend to me,’ said Eveline, with difficulty restraining her tears.

‘It must be rejected, I say!’

‘But the estate is not left to you, Sir Paget.’

‘Estate!’ said he scornfully. ‘A few acres of bog and heather, and a mansion that probably keeps out neither wind nor weather.’

So no action was taken in the matter for a time, and the letter of Messrs. Horning and Tailzie, W.S., remained unanswered, much to the surprise of these gentlemen (who deemed themselves persons of no small importance), and was to remain so until the return from cub-hunting at Hurdell Hall. Sir Paget was sorely ruffled by this new event, and felt himself at liberty to sneer vulgarly at Eveline’s former lover, and at her shattered fidelity to any vows she made by her marriage with

himself; whereas the poor girl had never made one. She felt that—as a wedded wife—she must stand alone in her secret grief, and beyond the pale of human succour or sympathy, and the sweet words of ‘Auld Robin Gray’ occurred to her:

‘I daurna think o’ Jamie, for that wad be a sin.’

Times there were when she dreamt of Evan vividly, and that he was with her again. ‘Why should it be a miracle that the dead come back?’ asks an author; ‘the wonder is that they do not. How can one go away who loves you and never return, nor speak, nor send any message—that is the miracle; not that the heavens should bend down, and the gates of Paradise roll back, and those who have left us return.’ At such times he seemed near to her, and his voice was in her ears—more near to her than he had ever been. He loved her, but he was gone—gone, and the grey day was stealing slowly in! Olive, she thought, she must see Olive; doubtless Allan must have written home to her, and his letters might contain some details of this catastrophe that she would learn nowhere else, so she contrived a visit to Puddicombe Villa at Southsea on their way to Hurdell Hall. But she gained nothing by this. Lady Aberfeldie had heard of the late event in Egypt, and saw in a moment how it had affected her daughter.

‘She is a very sensitive girl, Sir Paget,’ said she deprecatingly, in reply to a somewhat stinging remark of his; ‘and thus you see the sudden death of this young man, so recently our guest at Dundargue, and so long her brother’s tried friend and comrade, and one to whose courage that brother and all of us owe so much, has—not unnaturally, I think—greatly shocked her.’

‘Shocked her rather too much, apparently,’ jerked out Sir Paget, with a grimace. ‘Who could have supposed that so brief an acquaintance—shall we call it an acquaintance?—could have produced an impression so deep?’

Lady Aberfeldie bridled up a little and crested her handsome head ; for, like Sir Paget, she had her own thoughts on the subject.

‘ Well, he is gone now,’ said she, after a pause.

‘ And a devilish good thing, too,’ added Sir Paget roughly.

She made no rejoinder, conceiving that the less that was said on the matter the better. Eveline found Olive in a very crushed state. Allan had never written to her, and, as yet, even his mother’s letter of explanation had not been replied to. Perhaps he did not believe in it. He had left her abruptly and passionately and with a sore heart. Many such hearts are caught by others on the rebound, for the void in them is more easily filled up, and often requires to be so.

‘ Oh, Heaven,’ she thought, ‘ if such should be the case with Allan—not in Egypt, for that was very unlikely, but at Gibraltar or Malta, where English ladies were to be met with !’

‘ Even if married, I fear you would never win the Dunmow Flitch,’ Lady Aberfeldie had said to her angrily on one occasion.

‘ My unfortunate money has been the cause of all this,’ replied Olive. ‘ It excited the cunning and cupidity of that unfortunate man, Holcroft, and has led to the saddest misconceptions and misconstructions from the first between dear Allan and myself,’ she added, in tears.

‘ Most true.’

Olive knew that the doubtful position in which she had been placed with reference to Allan had, as she thought, been fully explained away in writing by his mother, and his father too ; but from Allan there came no letter to herself. What did his silence mean ? Even anger were better than nothing.

‘ My unfortunate money,’ she repeated : ‘ my golden chains have proved a curse to us both. He has ceased to love me now, and, loving him as I do, what can my life be to me ? And how shall I live on through all the months and years of it

without him? What if we never meet again! He may fall in this war as his friend Cameron fell—oh, my love—not you—not you—not *that*.’

And the luckless girl wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XLI.—A SKIRMISH IN THE DESERT.

BURIED in the sand! Yes—it was all true—too true; the gay, handsome, and usually light-hearted Laird of Stratherroch, one of the most popular fellows in the Black Watch—he who had won the V.C. in battle with his good claymore—he whom Eveline had known in the heyday of his life, when the world seemed so fresh and fair to both, whom she had last seen as a despairing and broken-hearted lover, was gone—struck down by a bullet of some nameless Egyptian savage, buried in the desert, and she would never see him more, though the poignancy of his farewell would haunt her for many a day. And thus it all came to pass. A band of Bedouins had been hovering in the vicinity of Matarieh, plundering and looting. These Allan, after a consultation with Cameron, resolved to make a demonstration against, and with Farquharson, his sergeant, and thirty picked men, in light marching order, they quitted the village, and about an hour before sunrise took their way towards the desert. The light of the coming day shone along the latter, a sandy waste, overlooked by Jebel Mokattam, a chain of rocks abrupt and barren that extends from Cairo to the cataracts. They are generally flat, with beetling summits, while below, on the face which fronts the Nile, they are furrowed as if water-worn by the rain of ages.

On the other flank, towards Jebel Dimeshk, rises a ridge of sand-hills that follows in the same direction, at an equal distance, all the windings and sinuosities of that which lines the eastern bank. Between lay the winding line of the disused railway. In front the horizon seemed foggy or dusty, and

along the desert the sun shone for a time, as he rose, like a red ball, shorn of his rays. In rear the party left behind the village of Matarieh, with the clumps of palm-trees, beyond which, with the tall obelisk and the ruins of several sphinxes, rose the great mounds of earth that mark the site of Heliopolis, 'the City of the Sun,' the inhabitants of which worshipped a bull called Mnevis, with the same ceremonies as the Apis of Memphis, and where Apollo had an oracle. Over the same ground where in 1800 a battle was fought between the French and Turks, in which the latter were defeated with the loss of eight thousand men and all their cannon and baggage, Allan's little band marched merrily on towards the desert in hope to 'polish off' a few of the Bedouins before returning to quarters. They were well supplied with ammunition; each man had a day's rations in his haversack, and his water-bottle filled with the red sandy fluid of the Nile. In Exodus we are told that the Egyptians loathed to drink the waters of that river, and, as Cameron said, 'the men of the Black Watch were much of the same mind.'

Now, in making a reconnaissance, Allan Graham was a trained soldier enough to know that cover from view is important, as it enables troops, whatever their strength, to form for action; thus he hoped to utilize the railway bank, or, if not that, some of the sandy undulations around it. As the first object in reconnoitring is to get observation, with his sergeant, who was a sharp fellow, he went at some distance in front of his men, field-glass in hand, and looked sharply about him. He continued to move in a north-easterly direction for nearly ten miles till mid-day, but saw nothing of Bedouins, and then, halting amid a clump of palms, threw out some sentinels towards the front, piled arms, and the Highlanders in their kilts and red serges threw themselves on the grass and prepared to make a meal of what they had brought with them, washed down by Nile water. There he remained till noon was long

past, and he began to think of falling back on Matarieh. Even under the shadow of the palms they were tormented by gnats and sand-flies.

‘We are in the land of the “Arabian Nights”—the land of giants, fairies, and genii, and all that sort of thing,’ said Cameron, as he lit a cigar; ‘but, if a little picturesque, Allan, the discomforts are abominably real.’

‘Surely water is lying yonder, sir,’ said Sergeant Farquharson, ‘and we might get our water-bottles filled.’

All looked eagerly in the direction indicated, towards the base of the Jebel Dimeshk range. The sun was clear, bright, and powerful now. Amid the silent waste of sand a long, narrow lake seemed at no great distance.

‘If water it is,’ exclaimed Cameron, ‘there are certainly men moving through it.’

‘The Bedouins, by Jove!’ cried Allan. ‘Down, down,’ he shouted to his sentinels, ‘lie down, under cover if you can.’

They lay down flat, and Allan, adopting the same position, turned his field-glass towards the *mirage*, for such it was—that beautiful optical illusion produced by the sun’s rays reflected from the heated sand, and which raises before the eye of the thirsty wayfarer the tantalizing but perfect representation of distant lakes or pleasing sheets of water. About eighty Bedouin horse were moving slowly from the direction of the Jebel Dimeshk range towards the line of the railway. Whatever their object was, from a description given to Allan, he was certain they were those of whom he was in search, and that their object was to turn up in the vicinity of Matarieh after sunset, intent on plunder, as everywhere these lawless sons of the desert were taking advantage of the confusion of affairs in Egypt. Some were armed with long muskets of antique form, but by far the greater number had Remington rifles—flung away by Arabi’s fugitive soldiers—slung over their backs, or at their saddles—weapons that had superseded the javelin, the

bow, and in many instances the spear. They were clad in barracans of dark brown wool, with floating burnouses, many of them spotlessly white; and as they seemed to be making slowly, for shelter doubtless, towards the clump of palms occupied by Allan's party, which was yet beyond their range of vision, he drew the whole off and took post behind the bank of the abandoned railway, a movement which was fortunately quite unseen by the foe. Formation against cavalry would be useless, as these wild horsemen have no idea of tactics; and, to deceive them as to his force, Allan formed his men in extended order, three paces apart, each man lying on his face, close under the line of the embankment. Allan knew from experience how fire from a deep slope becomes plunging; thus he congratulated himself that the slope for his musketry was one that was parallel to the trajectory of the rifles. By a single word he could, if necessary, form his men in a rallying square on the crest of the line. As the Bedouins came riding forward, in a disorderly group, at an easy, ambling pace, Allan, by means of his field-glass, was certain that in their leader he recognised the Arab, Zeid-el-Ourdeh, whom he had succoured after his wounds at Kassassin, and sent to the hospital at Ismailia. He was wearing the same robes with wide sleeves, and the richly embroidered girdle he wore when found near the camp.

'Steady and still, men,' cried Allan, 'and we'll play old gooseberry with these beggars, as we have done everywhere else.'

They were about five hundred paces distant, a range for which the rifles were sighted, when suddenly a Bedouin uttered a shrill cry of alarm, and all began to unsling their firearms. His eye had detected a clay-coloured helmet with its red hackle on the left side. Ere they could fire a shot, the Highlanders from their cover poured in a deadly fire, and more than twenty men and horses went down in confused heaps; the latter, in the agony of their wounds and terror, kicking and lashing wildly

out with their hoofs, raising clouds of sand, while braining the skulls and breaking the limbs of the fallen riders, whether dead or wounded ; then shrieks and groans, cries and curses, loaded the air, as all who were untouched or able to keep their saddles, after firing, half at random, a ragged volley, wheeled round their light chargers and went off with the speed of the wind.

‘Cease firing!’ cried Allan Graham ; ‘we have taught these fellows a lesson severe enough for the day, and I don’t think they will venture near Matarieh again.’

In that, however, he was mistaken, as he afterwards found to his cost.

‘And now,’ he added, as he crossed the line of railway, sword in hand, ‘to give water to the wounded, succour any we can, smash all their weapons, and leave them to fate or their returning friends.’

He, with most of his party, approached the place where the victims of the fusilade lay, and, so far as blood, wounds, and agony went, they presented a very dreadful scene, and yet a trifling one when compared with that witnessed so lately in the trenches of Tel-el-Kebir.

Many were shot outright ; others, severely wounded, lay wallowing and choking in their blood, and they regarded the victors with a firm, scowling, and defiant expression in their long, thin, tawny faces and black, bright, glittering eyes, that made them look, as Allan said, like dying eagles. But, before anything could be done for the survivors, the fatal episode of the day took place. A little way apart from the group of death and agony lay a Bedouin, who, though untouched, was partly under his horse, from which he freed himself, and then Cameron advanced to take him prisoner. He was an athletic and gigantic fellow, all bone and sinew, lithe as a serpent, and active as the antelope of his native deserts. Drawing a long pistol from his girdle, he levelled it at Cameron, but it snapped, on which he flung it furiously at the head of the latter, who ducked and

escaped it. Several Highlanders now rushed forward, as he had drawn a large and heavy Damascus sabre, but they paused with their hands on their locks when Cameron cried, 'Stand back, my lads, and leave him to me!' And in a moment both their blades were flashing in the setting sun, for Cameron fell upon him claymore in hand.

'May your head be covered by a whirlwind of fire!' hissed the Bedouin in Arabic, through his clenched teeth, while he hewed away without the least intention of surrendering. The hood of his red and white striped burnous had fallen back, and his whole head and face, with flashing eyes and gleaming teeth, were displayed to view.

Cameron was a skilful swordsman, but so was the Bedouin, who was his superior in height and muscular power. Their blades struck red sparks from each other. Cameron forgot to draw his long dirk; but he had 'Sir Garnet's' ugly jack-knife in his left hand for parrying purposes. How the combat would have terminated it is difficult to say, but a vile Bedouin, who lay wounded close by, armed with a long, straight sword, with the last effort of expiring nature, writhed himself up from the sand, ran poor Cameron through the body from behind, and fell back dead. With a hollow groan, Cameron fell backward across him, and was about to receive a finishing stroke from his antagonist, when the latter was shot through the head by Sergeant Farquharson. This catastrophe rather cooled Allan's humane ideas of succouring the wounded. Very few of the Highlanders had been touched, and these but slightly. However, it seemed as if Cameron was dying. He was speechless, and his mouth at times was filled with blood. It was impossible then to ascertain the exact nature of his wounds, or what part of the body was injured. Allan, full of tenderness, anxiety, and the deepest commiseration, formed a pad of his handkerchief, and, using his sash as a bandage, endeavoured, so far as in him lay, to stop the bleeding, while a litter was improvised by a

couple of rifles, with a blanket stretched over them ; and the party began to fall back on Matarieh, but often had to halt, for the agony of Cameron was great, and Allan began to despair of getting him conveyed in life to Matarieh, which, as we have said, was nearly ten miles distant ; while, to enhance their difficulties, a troop of nearly a hundred Bedouins were visible, pouring down a rocky gorge of the Jebel Mokattam range ; so nothing was left to Allan but to continue his retreat, which they seemed slow or disinclined to follow up. Yet their presence was fraught with danger, especially after the sun, with its usual rapidity in these regions, went down like a red, fiery ball, and the lurid haze exhaled from the flat desert on which the darkness fell.

The stars were coming out in the blue zenith ; the dew was already beginning to fall ; long and dark shadows lay across the plain, but the line of the railway was a sure guide back to Matarieh and the vicinity of Heliopolis. Every step of his bearers elicited a moan of pain from Cameron, and these went to the heart of his friend as if they had been the utterances of a brother, while now and then the sufferer muttered his thanks to the soldiers for their care and kindness, and his regret for the trouble he gave them after a day of toil, and his fears that he was retarding their retreat and thereby involving them in danger. Of his own pain or peril he never uttered a word. Constellations new to him and his comrades were in the sky now—a vast blue dome that stretched far, far away, all bright with glorious stars.

At last it was absolutely necessary to halt for a time, for all thought the sufferer was dying, and the Highlanders said that if the Bedouins came on again they would form square round him ; and soon it became too evident that Evan Cameron was lying ‘on the bleak neutral ground between life and death.’ Accustomed though they were to suffering and slaughter, the Highlanders stood around him leaning on their muskets, full of

commiseration, and looking attentively at the pale face of the dying officer, and back to the desert where they had last seen the enemy hovering; and more than one wished that the Bedouins would only come on again.

‘Has no man among us here any water?’ asked Allan, for by this time the tin bottles of the detachment were empty.

A man who was in the act of taking the stopper out of his, paused instantly.

‘Captain Graham, here is mine,’ said he; ‘there are only a drop or two left, but if it was my blood I’d give it for Evan Cameron,’ he added emphatically, with that familiarity which is peculiar to the Highlander, and has no rudeness in it.

‘Donald, thank you,’ said Allan.

‘My mother bides nigh the braes of Stratherroch, and I am not likely to forget that to-night,’ said the soldier, with a break in his voice.

Raising Cameron’s head gently, Allan put Donald’s water-bottle to his lips, and he drank thirstily of the fetid and odious water it contained, ‘the Nile soup,’ as our men called it. Refreshed even by it for a few minutes, Evan Cameron spoke to Allan, but in whispers, and, as they seemed to be meant for the ear of the latter alone, the soldiers with one accord drew back a little way.

‘I knew from the first that I should never pull through—nor do I wish to do so, Allan,’ said he, speaking at long intervals and with a husky effort.

‘We have faced death together in many ways, but I wish your case had been mine, Evan, even if it is to be a fatal one.’

‘Don’t say that, Allan, dear fellow,’ replied Evan, with that strange, far-off expression of eye which belongs alone to a fast-ebbing life—an expression which Allan could see even in the starlight as he stooped close over the sufferer, ‘my sight is failing me, yet I can in fancy see Eveline—oh! so distinctly, Allan—and I seem to hear her voice—you don’t mind me

saying this *now*, lying, as I am here, face to face with God—the voice that seemed to whisper to my heart.’

Allan could only press the clammy hand that never again would grasp the broad claymore. Evan spoke again, but still more brokenly : ‘I am not jealous now of my married rival ; I only sorrow for the lost future of Eveline ; married to an old man whom she may respect but never love, and with whom she cannot have a sympathy in common.’

‘You are talking too much, Evan.’

‘And thinking of her rather than my prayers. When I am lying here in my long and peaceful sleep, far from my father’s grave in bonnie Stratherroch, she will live all the years of a young life, and in the time to come will—of course, forget me.’

His voice was almost gone now, yet his eyes dilated when Allan said, with sorrowful emphasis, ‘Evan, she will never forget you.’

‘Nearer me—come nearer, Allan ; I—I want you to tell her—tell her——’

What he was to tell Allan never heard, as the voice of Cameron ceased ; a change, perceptible in the clear starlight, was passing over his face ; a dew was gathering on his forehead, and dark shadows under his eyes.

‘He’s gone, sir,’ said Sergeant Farquharson, lifting his helmet for a moment in mute reverence. ‘Well, Captain Graham, the golden gates have never closed upon a better officer or a braver man ! Poor Evan Cameron,’ he added, stooping over the body and looking at it earnestly.

Allan cast a long and sad glance at it too ; then he laid a hand on the heart ; it might be only syncope—no, it did not seem to be that. The profile of his face in its stillness looked like a classic cameo cut in high relief. His fair, almost golden, hair, clipped close with military precision, retained still its crispy ripple. The brown moustache shading the short upper lip had been somewhat untrimmed of late ; but he looked so

life-like that Allan almost shuddered as he spread the blanket over him and covered him up—for he felt that in that wretched substitute for a shroud lay one whom he knew his sister—married albeit as she was to another—loved better than life! It was hard to think of so young and gallant a life being cut short thus by the inexorable scissors of Fate; but he was gone to the ‘Land of the leal,’ where there can be no sorrow nor thought of sordid things.

‘We cannot leave him lying here thus; neither can we carry him off, while there is a chance of these Bedouin devils coming on again. Besides, there are always jackals about,’ said Allan, as he took possession of Evan’s claymore, dirk, and ring. ‘Scoop a hole—a temporary grave in the sand—and cover him up, till we can return by daylight, and bring him into quarters for proper interment.’

The soldiers, with their hands, bayonets, and rifle-butts, hollowed a trench some three feet deep, and therein, rolled in a blanket, they reverently deposited the yet warm form of Cameron, and covered it up with sand. Allan maintained a grim silence, and, though his heart was full of genuine grief, the remarks of his soldiers pleased him.

‘Those who have lived with us and died as he has done will never be forgotten in the regiment, sir,’ said Sergeant Farquharson.

‘Mourn for the mourner, I have heard my mother say in Gaelic, and not for the dead, as they are at rest and we in tears,’ said Donald, as he hooked-on his water-bottle.

‘He has none to mourn for him now but one, and she is far away,’ remarked Allan, with a swelling in his throat. ‘And now fall in, lads.’

The Highlanders marched on their way back to Matarieh in silence, impressed by the recent episode; for, if gallant and reckless fellows in battle, they were thoughtful and full of sorrow for the brave young officer they had lost. A shot or

two, fired apparently at random in the distance, sparkling out redly amid the obscurity, showed that the Bedouins were following them up, and must have passed over the very place where Cameron lay. The silence of the starry night was upon the world then—upon the ridgy summits of Jebel Mokattam, and darkness now enfolded the desert where Evan Cameron lay in such awful loneliness, without even the grim companionship of the dead—the last Cameron of the old fighting line of Stratherroch. Two days after, with an ambulance waggon, Sergeant Farquharson, and some of his men, Allan went along the line of the old railway from Matarieh to the place where they had left the body—a place marked in their memory by the presence of two large stones and some shrubs near the embankment—but of these they could find no trace, though they searched for hours, believing they might have passed them or miscalculated the distance. Nothing was to be seen about the real or supposed spot but sand, smooth and drifted sand everywhere. Thus Allan could but come to the sorrowful conclusion that some species of sand-storm must have swept from the desert south-eastward between the mountain ranges, and buried every trace of the hastily made grave.

CHAPTER XLII.—HURDELL HALL.

‘WELCOME to Hurdell Hall! My sister Lucretia—Lady Puddicombe and Sir Paget, Lucretia—Sir Paget, our mutual friend Poole, you know.’

Thus did Sir Harry Hurdell introduce Eveline and Sir Paget with much *empressement* and effusiveness, to his home in Hampshire, when the carriage duly deposited them, with Mademoiselle Clairette, Sir Paget’s valet, and ‘no end’ of trunks and boxes in a van, at the *porte cochère*. Situated in the northern district of the shire, where the woods are chiefly hazel, birch, alder, and willow, where flocks of deer scour the

coppice, Hurdell Hall is a fine example of the old Tudor architecture, and, as Eveline saw it for the first time with the rays of the evening sun casting dashes of golden light upon its ogee gables, mullioned bay-windows, its long gravelled approach, and stately terrace, she thought what a charming picture it would make, with its background of oaks, which in Hampshire seldom rise into lofty stems, but have branches that are usually twisted into picturesque outlines. Below the terrace lay a kind of pool, in which a couple of swans were floating lazily, each with one leg tucked up under a wing, and where the snow-white water-lilies gleamed in the sunshine. Nor was the inside of the Hall—which was to be associated with events never to be forgotten by Eveline—any way inferior to the outside. There were stately apartments furnished with every modern luxury in the way of upholstery, and others where the furniture spoke of an old, old past, and of generations of Hurdells who had long since been gathered together in the old family vault; panelled corridors adorned with busts of Roman emperors and gods; stuffed tropical birds and horns of gigantic size; cabinets, swords, daggers, helmets, and armour; and where portraits were hung of knights and dames in brilliant colours; one of Sir Harry, who accompanied the Royal Bluebeard to the field of cloth of gold; another who had been the comrade of Sir Horace of Tilbury in many a field in Flanders; and the Hurdells of later times in powdered wigs, toupees, and long stomachers.

There was also a charming little Gothic private chapel, which had now a luxurious divan around it, as the present Sir Harry, not being much addicted to devotions, had turned it into a billiard-room, and a most commodious and excellent one it was, as the niches were tall enough to hold cues, and the basin of the font was admirably calculated to hold the balls. Sir Harry was rather handsome, but *blasé* in aspect and bearing; there was an indolent and rather lascivious expression in his

eyes, the light colour of which it is difficult to define ; he had a transparent nostril and short upper lip, with long tawny moustache, and a face which, though difficult to say why, was not a pleasing one. His sister Lucretia, his senior by several years, was somewhat his counterpart in appearance, and, nearer her fortieth than her thirtieth year, was still very handsome, but handsome in a faded way ; and she received the young wife of old Sir Paget with considerable effusiveness, kissing her on both cheeks *à la Française* ; though Eveline, fair, soft, and timid even in friendship, felt oppressed rather than soothed or pleased by the society of this somewhat *blasée* and disappointed woman of the world, with her cold, steely eyes, ashy-tinted hair, thin lips, and caressing manner ; and Eveline soon discovered she was vain, shallow, selfish, and not unaddicted to white lies when they suited her purpose. Perhaps the creature she cared most for in this world, after herself and her brother, was a little, wheezy ‘King Charles,’ with a blue ribbon and silver bell adorning its neck.

While the gentlemen were smoking and idling in the billiard-room—the same place where Philip of Spain, *en route* from Southampton to marry Mary, had made his devotions—she entertained Eveline with afternoon tea in a charming little room dark with oak-panelling, with rare old oak furniture, and hangings of ancient tapestry that testified to the industry of white-handed Hurdells in generations past. Something of *ennui*, at least, in the young face of her new acquaintance did not fail to catch the attention of the sharp Lucretia, who knew from the first that Eveline’s marriage had been an ill-assorted one ; yet she said, after a pause, ‘You long to join the gentlemen, I think ; they are not far off—only at the end of the corridor.’

‘Pardon me, I am more pleased to be with you.’

‘Thanks, dear ; but I fear that you and Sir Paget are a pair of regular love-birds, and must go through a systematic amount of billing and cooing every day.’

Eveline smiled faintly, but made no response. Did Miss Hurdell mean this as a sneer? she thought; it seemed so.

'Dear Sir Paget!' said Miss Hurdell again, a little irrelevantly. 'I thought love-matches were out of fashion now.'

'She is mocking me,' thought Eveline, yet the rather aristocratic face of Lucretia was as inscrutable as her manner was suave to sweetness.

'All who know Sir Paget respect him—he is a thoroughly good man,' said Eveline, feeling the necessity of saying something.

'“Women always like wicked fellows,” says Lefanu, in one of his novels. It is contrast; but it has been my experience that they do.'

'No right-minded woman would endorse this opinion of our sex, I am assured.'

Miss Hurdell laughed at Eveline's gravity, and refilled their cups of dragon-blue china.

'I always hated the idea of being married,' said she.

'Why?' asked Eveline.

'Because it would make life—I thought—so tame.'

'How odd!'

'Ah, no doubt you think so. I didn't care about being engaged, and all that sort of thing; but no, I never would have married.'

Sooth to say, she had never had an offer, or been engaged, in her life.

'It is so nice to be a *fiancée*—the object of daily attention.'

'Then you must have been engaged to know all this, Miss Hurdell.'

'Like yourself, dear, of course—but call me Lucretia. A girl has more freedom when engaged than before it; though the envy of her female friends, she can be more natural with her gentlemen friends, and may say many a merry and rantipole thing she dared not have said before. Goldsmith was right

when he makes Dr. Primrose declare that courtship is generally a happier state than marriage. To me it seems to turn the butterfly into a caterpillar.'

Eveline knew what to think of these novel views, but she sighed as she thought of what her own existence was now.

'To me,' resumed the fair Lucretia, 'it always seemed as if, when the wedding-ring was slipped on my slender finger, I should have nothing left to live for; that my existence would belong wholly to another person.'

Eveline set down her teacup and looked at the speaker with something of mute wonder. In society she had met with many strange persons, but none who had such odd views as the mature chatelaine of Hurdell Hall.

'But you would have your husband to live for,' she urged gently, but certainly not thinking of her *own*.

'A very commonplace style of living, I should think.'

'Not if one marries for love,' said Eveline softly.

'As you married' (old was on her lips), 'as you married dear Sir Paget.'

Eveline felt her colour rise, yet she only said, 'But—but to marry with any doubt in one's heart would be deception.'

'Well,' said Miss Hurdell, raising her eyebrows, 'if a woman may not deceive her own husband, whom has she a right to deceive?'

This was a new view of the matter to poor Eveline, who began to have rather a horror of her hostess.

'There goes the dressing-bell, dear—we dine at eight,' said Lucretia, rising; 'let me conduct you to your room.'

Once there, Eveline was free to give full vent to her own thoughts. She would never see that lonely grave in the desert where Evan Cameron lay; but to her mind it was sacred, as of old was the place whereon the angel of the Lord alighted.

'Oh for some news—news of how it all came about! If Allan would only write to me—or to Olive; he surely will tell

her. This is more than I can bear!' and interlacing her slender white fingers—a way she had contracted now when alone—she pressed them, with palms outward, against her throbbing forehead, as if she meant to break them.

Alas! she was to learn too soon tidings of another dire calamity, and *why* Allan was unable to write to anyone.

There was no trace of all this deep emotion in her soft face when she descended to the drawing-room, with a velvet dress of that blue which so suited her pale complexion, cut square at the neck, and having elbow sleeves with lace, and rich mosaics set in gold clasping her white neck, and exquisitely rounded arms that were so white and taper. There could be no two opinions about her rare beauty, and Sir Harry Hurdell and his fast friend—fast in more ways than one—both acknowledged it at a glance, as their sharp and critical eyes took in every detail of her witching face, her rounded girlish cheek, her sweetly curved mouth, with its short upper lip, her nose and delicate nostrils.

Sir Harry Hurdell was very sceptical of the purity of all women. He would not have believed in that of his own mother, had she been alive; so he was perhaps to be pardoned for deeming that Lady Puddicombe 'was just like the rest,' whatever that might mean. He was intensely gratified and glad that the girl was so young and lovely, and that her husband was so old and so commonplace: thus he resolved, in his own phraseology, 'to enter stakes for the filly—to make his innings if he could, or the devil was in it!'

CHAPTER XLIII.—SIR HARRY.

THERE was an air of lassitude, of settled melancholy, and at times of abstraction, apparent about Eveline, which she could not always successfully conceal, that did not fail to impress and surprise the baronet of Hurdell Hall and his sister, and

the latter observed her narrowly when they were together in the drawing-room.

‘I have heard that you sing beautifully, Lady Puddicombe,’ said she, opening the piano.

‘I used to sing—a little,’ replied Eveline.

‘Used to sing ! Why drop so charming an accomplishment?’

‘I have had thoughts of late that make me sad.’

‘We must cure you of all that. What style of music do you love most?’

‘I love all music that is beautiful.’

‘And songs?’

‘That are melancholy.’

‘Then sing me some favourite thing before the gentlemen join us—there is a dear, do.’

Thus urged, and fearing to appear ungracious, Eveline seated herself before the instrument—a grand and very stately one it was, and began to sing in a voice that became tender, passionate, and beautiful, touching even the somewhat arid heart of her listener—by two of the verses especially :

‘Perchance, if we had never met,
I had been spared this mad regret,
This endless striving to forget,
For ever and for ever !

* * * * *

Ah me ! I cannot bear the pain,
Of never seeing thee again ;
I cling to thee with might and main,
For ever and for ever !’

She felt as if she were singing to Evan, who, perhaps, in spirit was hovering near her ; for Eveline was beginning at times to have strange fancies now. There were tears in her voice as she sang, and there were tears in her eyes too ; but she paused abruptly as the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, and the eyes of Sir Paget were fixed inquiringly and reprovingly upon her. Her voice seemed to pass away, nor could any entreaties of Sir Harry and his sister make her conclude the song—a well-known one.

‘Hah ! thereby hangs a tale !’ thought the fair Lucretia, as Sir Harry conducted Eveline back to her chair, and took a seat by her side.

No idle or constitutionally dissipated man can withstand the temptation of attempting to fascinate a pretty woman, and, if possible, of eclipsing another man, and to eclipse one like old Sir Paget would seem no very difficult task ; so, while talking quietly with Eveline on the last play, the last news, or any current subject, Sir Harry was thinking to himself, while admiring the contour of her head, her rich brown hair, long eyelashes, and lovely little hands, ‘By Jove, if old Pudd would only go off the hooks, anyhow ! She can’t care a straw for him, don’t you know, with his old bald pate that he is always jerking forward like a hen when she has laid an egg. She was in love with some fellow who has gone to Egypt—so Holcroft told me—been engaged to him perhaps ; but her mother was set upon her marrying old Pudd’s coin, and among them all they talked her into it, no doubt. Poor little girl, I must try to console her.’

Lucretia Hurdell, who at times affected girlish airs, now brought that piece of drawing-room foolery, her ‘Confession Book,’ upon the tapis.

‘You must positively write me yours, dear Lady Puddicombe,’ said she.

‘Or permit me to write there for you,’ suggested Sir Harry. ‘Now to begin—“Were you ever in love?”’

‘The idea of asking a married woman that,’ exclaimed Miss Hurdell.

‘If so, how often ?’ continued her brother.

‘I would say “Never,” according to the novelist’s idea of it,’ replied Eveline, with an air of annoyance.

‘Don’t know what that idea is,’ said Sir Henry, eyeing her askance and admiringly.

‘I should rather say I have been in love, but never mean to be so again.’

Eveline shivered as she said this, for while conversing apparently with Mr. Pyke Poole the cold eyes of Sir Paget were upon her again. She felt the rashness of her speech. It was offensive to him, and was not without some point in the mind of Sir Harry.

The cub-hunting was not to begin for a few days yet, and meanwhile the master of the house followed her about pretty persistently, so that she had, ere long, a restless feeling about it. When departing on a riding-party he anticipated Sir Paget by swinging her into the saddle, adjusting her skirts and reins, leaving Pyke Poole to do that office for Miss Hurdell, to whom, in return for pleasant quarters, he usually devoted himself, while she, with all her alleged indifference to matrimony, was not indisposed to receive his attentions. There was something in the occasional gaze of Sir Harry that puzzled the innocent Eveline and made her feel restless under it, especially when he hung over her at the piano, as he constantly did; and now she played more than she cared for, to avoid conversation and have freedom to indulge in her own sad thoughts.

‘Surely you must be tired of standing there so long, Sir Harry,’ she said once, with surprise.

‘Tired of what—listening to you or gazing on you?’ he replied, lowering his voice for her ear alone; ‘either were impossible.’

If he had been addressing a barmaid he could scarcely have made a more pointed remark; but so full was Eveline of thoughts too deep for words—thoughts of the untimely fate of one who loved her so dearly—to whose fate or past existence she dared not refer, and for whom she dared not wear even a black ribbon—that she did not perceive the admiration she was exciting in the breast of Sir Harry, and, in the quiet purity of her own heart, that such sentiments as his could exist never occurred to her. He ventured on one occasion to say some-

thing very pointed about the beauty of her hands as she idled over the piano keys.

‘As there are other ladies in the room, I cannot compliment you on your discrimination, Sir Harry,’ she replied coldly. ‘But what do you mean by saying such things to me?’ she added.

She began at last to perceive that there was a *meaning* in his voice. She felt offended, and wished the cub-hunting would begin, that the visit of herself and Sir Paget to Hurdell Hall might come the sooner to an end.

‘If I could only achieve a good long and quiet walk and talk with her,’ grumbled Sir Harry to himself; ‘but in this cursed place we are always interrupted—can’t attempt to make my innings or be with her alone. Lucretia, Poole, or some one else always turns up, and she—herself—never gives a fellow the chance wanted.’

Though innately wicked in heart and rejoicing that the poor girl had made—or been compelled by others to make—an ill-assorted marriage, something of pity for her began to mingle with his nefarious ideas and hopes, and that pity was as much akin to love as his *blasé* soul could feel.

‘It is a regular case of Beauty and the Beast—this marriage of old Pudd’s,’ thought he.

Finding her promenading on the terrace alone one evening, overlooking the pool where the swans swam among the snow-white water-lilies, he hastened to join her.

‘I don’t think you have seen our conservatories,’ he said. ‘Permit me to show you them.’

‘Thanks; I do so love flowers.’

They entered the long glazed avenues of potted plants and rich exotics, where rustic sofas with luxurious cushions were placed under the feathery foliage of acacias, and after idling a little, admiring flowers that were of great beauty and the perfection of professional gardening, Sir Harry brought her a tiny

bouquet of beautiful and sweetly scented violets, which, thoughtlessly, she placed in the bosom of her dress.

His eyes gleamed as he saw her do this. He said, 'So charmed to see the place assigned to my gift.'

'Why?'

'When I know what the flower imports in the language of flowers.'

'What does the violet import?' asked Eveline shortly.

'Is it possible you do not know?'

'I do not.'

'It means eternal love and constancy.'

'Indeed,' responded Eveline, with a tone of indifference. She felt inclined to detach the bouquet from her dress, and restore it to the giver, or deposit it on one of the iron shelves; but as that might have implied that she understood too much, she simply quitted the conservatory and went once more upon the terrace.

'The air is chilly here after the hot atmosphere of the conservatories,' said Sir Harry, greatly encouraged by the acceptance of his flowers; 'and that Shetland shawl is only an apology for a wrap over your head, though you look charming in it—permit me,' he added, as he drew it closer round her. Their eyes met as he did so, and she read an expression in his downward gaze that made her pale cheek crimson, and then grow pale again; and to avoid anything more she re-entered the house.

'It is because I am married to an old man that he dares to treat me thus, and so thinks little of me,' she began to reflect—'an old man whose eyes are ever full of angry reproach about poor Evan, who never wronged him even in thought. Oh, how hateful, how loathsome, my life is! If luxurious, it is duplicity, all!'

She actually began to think she would go away somewhere—where her father and husband would never find her—change

her name and be a governess, or something of that kind. The idea of suicide or anything so dreadful, in all her sorrow, bitterness, and humiliation of spirit, never occurred to her for a moment. She only hoped that God would direct her, pardon her for these rebellious feelings against fate, and let her live her own way and then die. Why did she not run away before her absurd marriage? she thought now, and before her young life was so utterly wrecked by it? But she forgot how, under the motherly care and authority of Lady Aberfeldie, she had always been in a certain constraint and awe, and how her own sudden jealousy of Evan Cameron had helped to bring that catastrophe about.

But this growing admiration on the part of Sir Harry Hurdell was a new experience in life to her. She was justly incensed by it, and knew that he was presuming upon her youth, her husband's age, and the too apparent aspect of an ill-assorted marriage. Their visit must be cut short at all risks; but what excuse was she to make to Sir Paget? for, with her knowledge of his jealousy of one who was dead, how was she to enlighten him on the subject of Sir Harry, whose manner proved to her somewhat obnoxious? The truth was that he was so much in the use and wont of having 'sherry-glass flirtations' at railway buffets, and so forth, that he was quite incapable of showing his admiration or regard in a subtle or pleasing, respectful or cavalier way, and even his own grooms might have been better hands at it than he, the lord of that grand old ancestral home.

CHAPTER XLIV.—THE CUB-HUNTING.

THE gong for breakfast sounded betimes at Hurdell Hall on the morning of the first day's cub-hunting, as an early hour is always most favourable for scent; and as several guests were invited, an ample meal was spread in the great dining-room, the several bay windows of which overlooked the terrace and

stately chase that spread far away beyond it. Sir Harry and his sister were the first who appeared, and the latter looked round for the morning papers, but could see none.

Now, though the 'fair Lucretia,' as her friends frequently called her, cared nothing about the war in Egypt, she liked to read about the movements of 'the upper ten thousand'—their births, marriages, deaths, and so forth—to all of which she addressed herself first, as a City man does to the money article.

'Where are the papers, Harry?' she asked.

'I have ordered the butler to take them all away,' said he.

'Even the *Morning Post*?'

'Yes; even the *Post*.'

'Why?'

'Look here. I do not wish Lady Puddicombe to see *this*,' he replied, taking a newspaper from his pocket, and indicating a paragraph—another brief telegram from Egypt—which ran thus :

'The detachment of the Black Watch which was sent to Matarieh to make a demonstration against the Bedouins of Zeid-el-Ourdeh has been ordered back to head-quarters, and seems to have lost its other officer—a very distinguished one—Captain Allan Graham, the Hon. the Master of Aberfeldie, who is supposed to have fallen into some of the same butcherly hands amid which Professor Palmer and his companions perished.'

'Good Heavens! *her* brother!' exclaimed Miss Hurdell actually changing colour.

'Yes; and it must be kept from her—to-day, at least,' said Sir Harry, concealing the fatal newspaper.

'Taken by the Bedouins—but she must learn it some time.'

'Well, I don't want her to learn it just now, poor girl, at all events. I can't make a mull of the arrangements for the day, and I don't want her to learn it here, if possible.'

'Why not here?'

‘Certainly not from me.’

‘Why not from *you*?’

‘I hate to be imparter of evil news.’

‘Oho!’ said Miss Hurdell, elevating her eyebrows; ‘sets the wind in that quarter?’

‘What do you mean, Lucretia?’

‘Well, that she is not the first married lady you have taken a tender interest in.’

‘Lucretia!’ exclaimed the baronet, in a tone of angry expostulation, as some of their gentlemen guests came noisily in, in Russell cords, top boots, and spurs, some in pink and some in black coats.

At that moment elsewhere were others who were more deeply and terribly interested in the startling tidings from Matarieh, flashed by the same electric wire. Lord Aberfeldie was leisurely opening the *Times*, which Mr. Tappleton had duly cut and aired for him, with the other morning papers. His eyes ran rapidly over the columns for the last news from Egypt, which seemed very tame now, as all the fighting and excitement were over; so Lady Aberfeldie was not watching him, as she used to do, with anxiety, and neither was Olive, who was already deep in the pages of the *Queen*, when an exclamation that escaped him made them both start.

‘What is the matter?’ cried Lady Aberfeldie. ‘You look ill, dear.’

‘Uncle, what do you see?’ added Olive. ‘Is anything wrong with—with——’

‘Allan—yes.’

He was pale with a strange grey pallor, totally unlike his usually sunburned and healthy tint, and he looked dazed as his face sank forward on his breast.

‘Our poor boy—our poor boy!’

‘God help us, Aberfeldie! What is it?’

Olive snatched up the paper, and, after reading the paragraph we have copied, reeled into a chair. And now a great horror fell upon all the three, the mother's memory flashing back to the baby-boy that had crowed and smiled upon her knee, and whose first tottering efforts to cross the nursery floor she remembered yet. Lord Aberfeldie, after recovering a little from the shock, telegraphed to the War Office for further information, but could obtain none. They read the fatal paragraph again and again, till every word of it seemed to be burned into their brains, and could but indulge in endless surmises, and hope against hope; for had not the public prints been teeming with the harrowing details of the capture of Professor Palmer, Captain Gill, and Lieutenant Charrington, and of them being pitilessly slaughtered by the Bedouins of the Aligal tribe?

As Olive recalled all this, her blood grew cold with apprehension. The paragraph, though a terrible one, was frightfully vague. He was 'supposed to have fallen' into the hands of the Bedouins. At all events, his party had come into Grand Cairo *without him!* She, like Lady Aberfeldie, could not realize it for a time. Alternately she sat like one stunned and then walked up and down the room with her slender fingers interlaced tightly and clasped upon her head, as if she would thereby still the trouble that throbbed in her brain and repress her heavy sorrow. In memory and imagination how often did she rehearse her angry parting scene with poor Allan and the last time she saw him—the forcible embrace of Hawke Holcroft; the latter's mocking love-making; the horror and loathing with which his touch inspired her; and Allan's terrible glance as he flung away and left her—left her for ever, as it seemed now.

Allan taken captive; he was sure to be slain like those of whom she had read so much lately. He was gone from her, and never more—never again could she show her repentant love for him, or make up for the omissions and follies of the

past by days of tenderness in the time to come. All was over now ! Profound was the speechless grief of his parents, and she was past attempting to console them.

‘Oh, Olive darling, don’t look so strange !’ said Ruby Logan, who had come on a visit to them at Puddicombe Villa.

The tears were running down Ruby’s cheeks, while those of Olive were strangely dry, as if her fount of tears was frozen as yet. Of Evan Cameron, if they thought at all amid this home calamity, they knew the worst—that he was dead and buried like so many of his brother-soldiers who fell at Tel-el-Kebir ; but of Allan they had yet the worst to know, if aught was ever known at all, which was extremely improbable.

So the long day passed on and night came, and Olive stood at the open window looking out at the waters of Spithead, the cold air from the sea blowing upon her face. She was in a kind of waking trance rather than deliberate thought, and strange figures like a phantasmagoria seemed to evolve themselves out of the darkness.

But to return to the hunting-breakfast at Hurdell Hall. All unconscious that a fresh sorrow would fill her tender heart ere long, Eveline came down in a charming morning-dress, looking pure and pale as a young arum lily, and was at once the cynosure of many admiring eyes ; for, in addition to Sir Harry, Sir Paget, and Mr. Poole, there were seven or eight others present, all in high spirits and eager for the sport. Not that Sir Paget affected field sports much, but he thought that it became his position to do so, and more especially as he was the husband of so young a wife, to display a certain amount of juvenility. All present were ruddy-featured country gentlemen of various ages, and while discussing an ample and genuine hunting-breakfast, though some who were connected with the farming interest spoke of the weather and the turnip-fly, of the Devonshire breed and short-horns, of mangold-wurzel and

the rotation of crops, matters about which, sooth to say, Sir Paget and Mr. Poole knew no more than they did about the philosophy of the Infinite, the conversation chiefly ran on the matter in hand that day—the disadvantage of having the dogs' collars too tightly buckled, of coupling a young hound with an old one, and so forth.

'A very bad plan,' said Sir Harry, 'as the older dogs always vent their spite on the younger by biting and rolling over them.'

'Because the pulling on both sides is not even,' said the Squire of Furzydowns, a noted old sportsman, 'and, if a pair of dogs so coupled come across a donkey, there is sure to be a row, for, when a bullock will look round in stupid wonder, a donkey is apt to fly at hounds with tooth and hoof.'

'A glorious morning this for the scent,' said Sir Harry; 'a dry autumn one. And now let us be off. The advantage of hunting early is that cubs or foxes, after a late supper or early breakfast, are seldom in a condition to run long, and get blown, as we all know.'

To Sir Paget, who had neither heart nor interest in sport, and was rapidly discussing the weather in all its probabilities, as to whether there would be a change or continuance of its present aspect and condition, Sir Harry said, 'Puddicombe, are you still determined to ride that bay horse with the white star?'

'Yes,' replied Sir Paget, with just the slightest *souffron* of bravado.

'Remember, I have warned you that he is rather a vicious brute, and apt to shy his fences.'

'Please, do not ride him, Sir Paget,' urged Eveline, in a whisper; 'do not, for my sake.'

'I should rather think of my own, if I do it for anyone's sake at all,' he snarled. He could not forgive her the general pallor and sadness of her face. Death, it is said, hallows the dead anew to the living. So it would be with the memory of Evan Cameron in the mind of Eveline, thought Sir Paget

bitterly, nor was he far wrong. And, no doubt, it *was* rather hard upon him to know that his wife's thoughts were all of another; but how innocently! 'As regards the bay horse,' he added, 'I will take my chance.'

He was loth to appear unable to do anything, and always deemed such advice as the present an imputation on his age or capability; thus, he did many a thing he would not have done had Eveline been twenty years older.

After a few words aside with Sir Harry, Eveline turned again to her husband, who had now left the table, and was finally adjusting his tan-coloured boot-tops.

'Do not ride the horse,' said she entreatingly. 'From what I hear, he is beyond you.'

'Is he?' snarled Sir Paget, who was in one of his worst humours this morning. 'But let me tell you, Lady Puddicombe, that I know something about the choice of a horse, if I don't about the choice of a wife!'

Eveline shrank back at this rude speech, and thought that, sooth to say, he knew little how to choose either.

'Well—ride the horse, if you will,' said she resignedly.

'I shall!' he replied sharply.

Lucretia detected that something was wrong, and, raising her voice in reply to something the Squire of Furzydown had said, she exclaimed laughingly, 'Ah, yes, the country is indeed glorious; for here you can have eggs to breakfast that are laid while your hair is being dressed, and flowers on the table fresh with the morning dew on them—yet, I love London most, after all, especially in the season. And now,' she added, 'shall my Charlie have its nicey, nicey breakfast of cream?' And she emptied a silver jug of the latter into a china bowl for her wheezy spaniel.

'What's up with old Sir Peter Teazle?' whispered her brother.

'That is more than I can tell you, Harry.'

The two ladies came forth to the door to see the gentlemen mount and depart.

Sir Paget got into his saddle with some difficulty, as the bay hunter swayed round and round, laid its ears back, and looked askance at him, with red and bloodshot eyes. Eveline knew not of her brother's calamity, and neither did Sir Paget, for none had spoken of Egypt or Egyptian news, and no one at Hurdell Hall was particularly interested in the Black Watch, herself excepted ; but she felt a mysterious and unaccountable prevision of coming evil, and once more drew near to offer her pretty hand to Sir Paget, doing so with affected playfulness, as the eyes of others were admiringly upon her ; but he, giving full rein to his thoughts about that dead Cameron, whom she had loved and he hated, stooped from his saddle, and said to her, with a bland smile meant also for other eyes :

‘ I have read, Lady Puddicombe, that “ nothing exalts a man so much in a woman’s mind as his dying. Look at the affection of widows as compared with that of wives.” Ah, you are sorrowful, no doubt ; but sorrow takes a long while to kill any one.’

She knew well what he meant. Her pale cheek crimsoned, and she turned without a word, deeming it both absurd and cruel that he should thus be retrospectively jealous. The hunters rode merrily off, all in high spirits, save Sir Paget, who jerked away with his head and was disposed to sulk, for the visit to Hurdell Hall had wrought no change on Eveline ; thus he did not, like his companions, enjoy the delightful sense of rest and peace in the cool morning ride to covert.

The country was silent ; ploughmen and shepherds were, as yet, scarcely abroad ; and the full-fed cattle lay couched on the damp grass that glistened with dew, and from amid which their breaths rose like silvery steam, and ere long the pack was in sight—Grasper, Pilot, Holdfast, Catch, and all the rest of them—

‘ With tails high mounted, ears hung low, and throats
With a whole gamut filled, of heavenly notes’

—at least in the estimation of the huntsmen. Ere long the pack was put into the covert, and stirrup leathers were tightened and readjusted in hot haste, but with the hunting, the whipping of unbroken hounds that took to running after sheep, the gallops over a few fields to get up an appetite for an early luncheon at the Squire of Furzydown's, the 'chopping' of cubs, our story has nothing to do, save in so far as one episode of the day is concerned.

Sir Paget in his heart wished 'the whole affair at Jericho' or in a warmer latitude. To him it was no amusement to set out without time for shaving, to breakfast at an untimely hour and before he could get up an appetite, and to ride through the morning mist, with icy feet and grasping reins sodden with dew, with the certainty of an attack of rheumatism, when he should have been cosily nestling in bed; and in addition to all these, having a terrible conflict ever and anon with the bay hunter. Sir Harry thought him 'a silly old fogie, who *would* go cub-hunting to show the world how juvenile he was,' and he was now beginning to console himself with the prospect of a luxurious luncheon at Furzydown and the long, lazy afternoon he would enjoy there before riding leisurely back in the evening to dinner at Hurdell Hall, when Sir Harry would be sure to sing them the old Coplow hunt song—

'Talk of horses and hounds
And the system of kennel,
Give me Leicestershire nags
And the hounds of old Menyell'

To Eveline the long day after the early breakfast passed very slowly at the Hall. She was in no anxiety for Sir Paget's speedy return, especially after the cloudy manner of his departure, but there were no other lady visitors there just then, and she and Lucretia Hurdell had not a thought, sympathy, or topic in common, and she sighed in utter weariness of spirit as the October day drew to a close, and the brown and purple shadows of evening began to fall.

She thought how many such empty days as this were before her, as autumn passed into winter, winter into spring, and the joyless summer—joyless at least to her—would come again. Every morning with its hopelessness, every noon with its listlessness, every evening seeming more blank than the one that preceded it. Would she ever more feel bright and merry as at Dundargue, and regain her sweet and playful habits of caressing affection? And for whom?

She stood in one of the many beautiful Tudor bay windows overlooking the terrace and chase, idly and full of her own thoughts, and, curiously enough, to her, the rustle of the ivy on the painted panes, of leaves as they fell from the trees, the stillness of the evening hour, and the cawing of the rooks in the old belfry of the house seemed ominous of coming evil. Dusk had come on, the trees were taking strange shapes against the sunset sky, a bat circled noiselessly before her, and the silver crescent of the moon came out above a coppice.

A few of these trivial things were, by after-events, fixed in her memory, and associated with that calm and almost sultry October evening—the lurid brightness of the sun as he set beyond the black stems of the trees of the chase, the perfume of roses, from a majolica jardinière in the bay window, and the angry hum of a great bee entangled among the lace of the curtains.

Suddenly she became aware that a group of men, some on horseback and some on foot, was slowly approaching the house by the avenue. Amid this group were four carrying a burden—a man apparently—on a door, or some such improvised litter. Then appeared a groom leading a horse by the bridle—the bay hunter with a white star on his forehead!

A gasping cry escaped her; her poor torn heart leaped, and then seemed to cease beating, with the dreadful certainty that something—a new calamity—had happened.

CHAPTER XLV.—ALLAN'S ADVENTURE.

EVIL tidings travel fast in these our days of electricity, and true it was that the unfortunate Allan Graham had fallen into the hands of the Bedouins, but nothing more was known. He had disappeared from Matarieh ! When his detachment marched into headquarters, Sergeant Farquharson reported that the Master of Aberfeldie had left the village for a ramble in the vicinity one evening, so far as could be known, and had not returned. After a careful search by the Highlanders at a certain spot, a cigar-case which had been given to him by Cameron of Stratherroch had been found, and in the immediate vicinity the soil bore the impression of foot and hoof marks, as if a struggle of some kind had taken place. If killed, he had not been killed there, as his body could not be found. Beyond these meagre and unsatisfactory details nothing more was known, save that the Bedouins, intent on plunder and outrage, had been daily hovering about in the vicinity of the mounds and ruins of Heliopolis.

Allan had felt very lonely after the loss of his friend Cameron, all the more lonely and full of tender interest for the general circumstances of his life and fate, and thus—as the sergeant reported—he had rambled from the village where his men were cantoned a little way into the vicinity to smoke and to ponder over the past and future. After Cameron's catastrophe he felt himself more disposed to think of Olive, and to think kindly and tenderly, and of his mother's explanatory letter concerning the extraordinary conduct of Holcroft and Olive's love and grief ; for we are told that 'among all the many kinds of first love, that which begins in childish companionship is the strongest and most enduring ; when passion comes to unite its force to long affection, love is at its spring-tide,' and in childish affection had the love of Allan Graham and Olive Raymond begun. He lay stretched on a patch of grass, where two or

three banana-trees grew near a ruined wall. The setting sun shed its red light far along the desert that stretched to the land of Goshen, with its luxuriant plains—yea, to the far horizon—and Allan, a thoughtful and a well-read man, as he looked around him, reflected, as he often did, how strange was the land where just then his duty led him—how strange that the Egyptians were there, without a tradition of a parent stock or of another land ; that it was only known that a few generations after the Deluge they had become a great nation. In the words of Apollonius Rhodius :

‘ Oldest of mortals they who peopled earth,
 Ere yet in heaven the sacred signs had birth.
 * * * * *
 Ere men the lunar wanderings learned to read,
 Ere yet the heroes of Deucalion’s blood
 Pelasgia purpled with a glorious brood ;
 The fertile plains of Egypt flourished then,
 Productive cradle of the first of men.’

Allan thought, as he manipulated and lit another cigar, that the Egyptians of Arabi Pasha must be of different and inferior stuff from those to whom the poet of the Argonauts referred.

And there, but a little way off, lay Heliopolis and Matarieh, two places of great and solemn memories—Heliopolis, where Herodotus sought the wisest men in Egypt ; where Strabo says they pointed out the house of Plato, where he then resided ; where Potiphar lived, who bought Joseph from the patriarch ; and Matarieh, a spot where the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Holy Child Jesus tarried, including a well under a withered sycamore in which, according to the legendaries, the Holy Mother washed her Divine Infant’s linen—a spot the turbaned Mussulmans still view with respect ; and thereby was the piper of Allan’s company playing ‘The Evening Retreat,’ and from the distance, over the flat ground, came the sound of his pipes, as he played ‘The Birks of Aberfeldie.’

Perhaps it was that his reflections were not of a very lively nature, or that he was wearied by a long reconnaissance that

morning in the direction of El Khan-Kah, but he, perilously for himself, dropped insensibly asleep, all unaware that a party of Bedouin horsemen, with hoof muffled in the soft sand, had formed a kind of semicircle round him, cutting off all chance of escape. He could not have been asleep more than five minutes when the little prick of a lance which drew blood roughly roused him. He started to his feet, and found himself confronted, surrounded indeed, by some twenty dusky sons of the desert, with hawk-like features, eyes that gleamed, and teeth that glistened exultantly.

Their weapons—Remington rifles or swords—were all pointed at him, and he could but surrender his sword and revolver, but with a sigh of despair and mortification. He might have slain one at least, but to what end? as the next moment he would inevitably be cut to pieces himself, while, perhaps, by not courting death then, he might only be delaying a cruel and unknown doom. These Bedouins could see that Allan was a magnificent specimen of manhood—a man born to command. They did not further molest him, save that one suddenly threw a looped cord over his right arm, and secured it to the bow of his saddle, thereby indicating significantly enough that he was to consider himself, in the first place, a prisoner.

One who rode a camel, and seemed to be in authority, pointed towards the hills—the Jebel Dimeshk range—and they got into motion at once, rather roughly dragging Allan after them. His proud heart swelled at this indignity; he felt all the danger of his position, and knew that, if he would escape death or some strange and protracted captivity, it was necessary to temporize and dissemble.

Mustering all that he knew of Arabic, picked up in the Punjab and beyond the Indus, after a few moments of agonizing reflection, he said to the man whose special prisoner he was, ‘Now that I am your captive, what are you going to do with me?’

‘Take you to the hills,’ replied the Bedouin, surprised, and not ill pleased to hear a Frank address him in his own language.

‘For what purpose?’

‘To keep you till ransomed—perhaps.’

The adjective had rather an unpleasant sound just then, so Allen said, ‘And if not ransomed?’

The Bedouin slapped the butt of his Remington rifle and grinned, showing all his pearly teeth, with fierce signification.

‘Who is your leader?’ asked Allan, after a pause.

‘That you will discover when you see him.’

‘I trust he will spare my life, at all events.’

‘What does your life, or the lives of all the accursed Franks in the world, matter?’ exclaimed another Bedouin; ‘may you all perish by the hand of God by drowning, as Pharaoh and his host perished, or by His causing the earth to open and swallow you up, as, the Koran tells us, happened to Korah!’

Whether a rumour had reached them of the sharp manner in which Colonel Warren overtook and punished the Arabian assassins of Professor Palmer and his companions in misfortune, Allan knew not. One fact was evident, that they were resolved to lose no time in carrying him off to their tents among the sandy recesses of Jebel Dimeshk.

They ambled on their way so fast, keeping him at a species of run, that he was on the point of sinking, and besought them to spare him a little; so, at the command of their leader, they halted for a little time in the starlight, and, weary and worn with toil and many emotions, he threw himself on the ground to rest. He closed his eyes, not to sleep, but to think over his new and calamitous position, and the chances of achieving an escape from it. If money was required—unless the sum demanded proved too enormous—he could produce a ransom, and he turned uneasily on his sandy couch as he thought over all his chances of success.

How like a horrible dream—a nightmare it all appeared—as those terrible hours spent in the vault at Dundargue had done.

What would be thought of his disappearance by the regiment and at home, and memory flashed back to his soldierly father and tender mother—for, with all her aristocratic pride, tender she had ever been to him—so his first thoughts were of her. 'In the man whose childhood has known caresses there is always a fibre of memory that can be touched to gentle issues ;' so—a captain now, and in such savage hands—his first ideas were of his mother's grief, rather than of poor, repentant Olive.

He might be butchered in the desert, and never heard of again, for his life was at the mercy and caprice of the most lawless people in the world. His disappearance as a mystery would soon become public property at home. There would, he knew, be all manner of newspaper paragraphs, suggestions, and surmises for a few weeks, and then, when these ceased, his story and his fate would be as much forgotten as last year's snow. Again his captors began their march towards the mountains ; and times there were, as he struggled forward to keep pace with them, when, in fierce revolt against the whole situation and its dreadful uncertainties, he felt as if his heart would burst, and a kind of agonized hopelessness crept into it.

The Bedouins conveyed him some five-and-twenty miles or more into the mountains, till they reached a kind of oasis, where their tents, which were very numerous, stood. Day was on the point of breaking, and Allan was utterly worn out.

However keen excitement may be, Nature will demand her due, so he slept on a dirty Bedouin *barracan*, and ere he did so, so great was the mental and bodily toil he had undergone, that he felt a kind of pleasure as drowsiness came upon him—a happiness to find oblivion—oblivion for a time even. To forget was a species of joy. And so he slept, despite those plagues of Egypt, the gnats, mosquitoes, and sand-flies. In the morning he was informed that the chief of the tribe, who would be the arbiter of his fate, was as yet absent ; and that, if he made the slightest attempt to escape, he would be shot down without mercy.

‘God is great,’ added his informant, who, like most Mussulmans, interlarded his conversation with pious allusions and quotations from the Koran ; ‘and whatever He has decreed will and must come to pass.’

For breakfast they brought him a few dates soaked in melted butter, a little sweet milk and curds. — So simple are the habits of the Bedouins that one can subsist for a whole day on such a repast, and deem himself happy and luxurious if he can add a small quantity of corn-flour or a little ball of rice. Meat being usually reserved for the greatest festivals, they rarely kill a kid, save for a marriage or a funeral, though some tribes eat the flesh of the gazelle and the desert cow. A couple of days on such food, with rough usage and toil—for they compelled him to groom their houses—a toil degrading to a man of spirit, rendered Allan somewhat faint.

He learned incidentally that there was another Frank a prisoner in their hands, who no doubt, like himself, was anxiously awaiting the return of the Bedouin chief.

CHAPTER XLVI.—AMONG THE DWELLERS IN TENTS.

WITH waking each morning Allan’s miserable thoughts returned, and, undeterred by the threat of being shot if he attempted to escape, he thought of nothing else, and closely inspected the Bedouin camp and its vicinity with that view, despite the warning of the principal Bedouin, whose name he ascertained to be Abdallah, or ‘the servant of God,’ who repeatedly told him that he hoped ‘the English would have their faces confounded,’ the exclamation of the Angel Gabriel when he threw a handful of gravel against the foe at the battle of Bedr.

As the Bedouins never reside in towns or occupy houses, they live in encampments, pitching their tents wherever they can find pasturage for their horses and camels, changing the

site of their abode as often as the support of their cattle or the vicinity of a more powerful and hostile tribe may compel them. Sometimes they sow a little Indian corn, and return to reap it when grown. The milk of their cattle and a few esculents found in the desert are their chief food. All are trained to the use of arms, and are skilled in horsemanship, and Allan could perceive that the care of the flocks and herds was committed mostly to the women, while the youth of the tribe—all fellows spare of form, light of limb, and active as their native gazelles—were in their saddles scouring round the camp, and practising the use of the javelin, the spear, and the Remington rifle, with which many in Lower Egypt were now armed, as they had been flung away in thousands by the fugitive soldiers of Arabi. The innate love of freedom which is fostered by the facilities for a nomadic life, and the desert-locomotion which his horses and camels afford him, impart to the Bedouin a dignified and haughty bearing, which contrasts powerfully with the servility and pusillanimity of the rustic sons of Egypt.

Unchanged from unknown generations, they are the same as when Volney wrote of them—‘Pacific in their camp, they are everywhere else in a habitual state of war. The husbandmen whom they pillage hate them ; the travellers whom they despoil speak ill of them ; and the Turks, who dread them, endeavour to divide and corrupt them.’

Their wandering life affords more freedom to their women than usually falls to the lot of Moslem females, and the wild desert, where they always dwell, becomes in many cases the actual scene of those keen and passionate love adventures which are depicted in the tales and poems of the Arabians. If Allan would escape from these Bedouins, he would require to have all his wits about him, and not risk the slightest mistake.

‘The child of the desert, reared in continual wandering, possesses in the fullest degree the activity of *sense*,’ says a writer. ‘His spirit is all abroad in his perceptive organs ; he

is voluble and sagacious, quick, passionate, and sympathetic, but by no means intellectual. Quickness of perception and strength of imagination are mental characteristics of the Bedouin, and superstition, the child of ignorance, is nowhere more powerful than among the wanderers of the desert.'

But in what direction was Allan to bend his steps, if he contrived to elude his captors? He might only wander into the barren desert—a sea of sand—there to perish of hunger and thirst, or be overtaken to suffer a cruel death. Reflection showed him that it would be better to temporize—to await the return of the sheikh, and endeavour to treat about a ransom. Beyond the encampment of rude tents, which they carry with them from wadi to wadi—the male portion employing their horses and camels in the transport from one oasis to another—Allan could see the desert, traversed by the camel route to Suez by Regum-el-Khel, spreading far away to the north-east, the horizon enveloped in fog in the morning and evening, for the season was moist now.

Near the camp was the tomb of a santon, or holy man, surmounted by a little white dome, and shaded by date-trees. Had the camp been pitched on higher ground, instead of in a green hollow, Allan might have known his precise whereabouts, as he would have seen in the distance to the south Mount Mokattam, crowned by the citadel of Cairo, with the many minarets of the great capital at its base.

On the third day, a commotion was caused by the arrival of the sheikh, who rode in, accompanied by an escort all well armed and mounted. Allan was at once brought before him, full of natural anxiety to learn his fate, and great was his satisfaction to discover in him Zeid-el-Ourdeh, the Bedouin whom he had found wounded and bleeding near the camp of the Black Watch, and whom he had succoured and sent rearward to the hospital at Ismailia. The recognition was mutual. He sprang from his horse, tossed the bridle to an attendant, and

welcomed Allan to his tents, adding, 'I called you my brother when, after Kassassin, I thought the hand of death was upon me; and you are not the less my brother now that you have eaten bread and salt with my people.'

He had quite recovered from his sword-wound apparently, and as he moved about in his long, flowing dress, with the ends of his shawl-turban floating over his shoulders, his bearing and aspect were stately and graceful.

Allan, encouraged to find that his personal safety was now so far secured, ventured to speak of his liberty; but Zeid shook his head, while a glitter, suggestive, not of cruelty, but unmistakably of greed and avarice, came into his eyes; and he informed his prisoner that he would have to accompany the tribe further into the desert, to another oasis, where the grass was green. His heart sank on hearing this. Whether Zeid-el-Ourdeh meant to retain him as a species of hostage, in the hope of a ransom, or in the absurd idea of attaching him to his own fortunes, as useful from his knowledge of arms and European tactics, Allan could not divine. Anyway, his life for the present was safe in his hands, though Zeid's power might fail to protect him from other Bedouins, or the exasperated fellaheen of Arabi Pasha.

Zeid gave him back his claymore, which Allan greatly valued, as it was a family heirloom—an old Ferrara blade, which his father and grandfather had worn in the Black Watch long before him. Zeid's own sword was a very remarkable one, which he had found in the sand near the Red Sea. It was long, straight, and double-edged, with a cross-guard of the middle ages, and had evidently been the trusty blade of some pious crusader, who had lost it, with his life perhaps, on the way to Jerusalem; and, like the sword of the Cid, it was inscribed, *Ave Maria gratia plena dominus tecum*.

'You look half-starved!' said Zeid, as he regarded Allan's face.

‘I am wholly starved. I have had only some dates and milk for three days,’ replied Allan, who, with some satisfaction, heard him order a kid to be killed, that they might have a repast together, and then he ordered the other Frankish prisoner to be brought before him.

‘Holcroft!’ exclaimed Allan, in a breathless voice, and scarcely able to believe his senses, when one, who seemed undoubtedly that obnoxious personage, was dragged before the sheikh with a sullen and defiant air, scarcely suited to the situation. His European surtout and trousers were discoloured, tattered, and torn; he had on a scarlet tarboosh, and wore his fair beard at some length now.

‘Holcroft!’ exclaimed Allan again, ‘you here? Here in Egypt—what a miracle is this?’

‘Your words express more surprise than pleasure,’ replied Holcroft, while Zeid-el-Ourdeh looked from one to the other in some surprise at their evident sudden recognition. ‘Ah,’ he continued, with a malevolent grimace, ‘you thought I was drowned, no doubt, and feeding the fishes in the Solent!’

‘You are reserved for a drier and more deserved death, I presume,’ said Allan.

‘Sneer as you may over me and my misfortunes——’

‘Misfortunes, you miscreant! But how in the name of wonder——’

‘If you care to know how I came to be here, in the same unpleasant and unsavoury hands with yourself—a gunboat picked me up off Southsea, for I am a strong swimmer, but, for all that, was too exhausted to be sent ashore. I was put into the sick bay and brought on here, all the way to Ismailia, and then turned adrift to live by my wits. I made my way to Cairo, and was fain to become billiard-marker at the hotel where I saw you, and once again at the review before the Abdin palace. The hotels, and cafés too, tired of me. I was setting out on foot to overtake some of your invalids *en route* to

Ismailia, when these infernal Bedouins nabbed me, and I am here.'

'And now that you are here, may I inquire what you mean to do with your precious self?'

'Take office under the Khedive's government. There will be no end of nice pickings for Europeans now that the shindy is over.'

'Office—as what?'

'Oh, anything—I am not particular—Inspector-General of Harems would suit me to a hair—down to the ground, in fact.'

'Bantering villain! And how about those diamonds you stole from Miss Raymond—a luckless heirloom in our family, always bringing evil to the holder or wearer?'

'Well, they have brought no evil to me yet,' replied Holcroft, with a defiant grin—a dogged one too; 'I have them safe here,' he added, slapping his breast pocket, 'and don't mean to part with them. They are quite a fortune to me.'

And he had the folly, the madness, in mere bravado, to show them for a moment.

'Keep these, fellow—they are certain to bring you ill-luck in some way.'

‡ Allan was nearer the truth than he thought, as the sharp eyes of the sheikh saw the flash of the stones, and the spirit of acquisition was instantly kindled in his breast.

'Well, thought Allan, 'this unexpected meeting is a strange coincidence; but, as Miss Braddon says, "life is made up of curious coincidences."'

CHAPTER XLVII.—KISMET.

ALLAN was aware that the sheikh had seen the jewels, though for a moment only, that were in Holcroft's possession. He knew that greed and the *Lex Talionis*, or law of retaliation, are

distinctive marks of the Bedouin character ; but he also knew that their regard for hospitality is not a less remarkable characteristic, and that even an enemy is secure if he can obtain refuge in a tent. Ali Bey (otherwise known as Don Pedro de la Badia) relates that when a Bedouin heard that his wife had given food to his mortal foe, who had sought charity at his tent, not knowing who or what he was, observed, 'I should probably have slain my enemy had I found him here ; but I should not have spared my wife had she neglected the sacred laws of hospitality.'

But Allan felt doubtful how the sheikh might be disposed to respect these laws in the case of one like Holcroft, who had not fled to his tents for succour, but been brought there a captive, and had comported himself in a dogged and defiant way.

'And you had actually sunk to being a billiard-marker?' said Allan.

'For a time—yes ; nothing comes amiss, so money comes withal. When taking stock of my affairs I found them shady—very ; my assets falling far short of my liabilities. Thus I was forced to play out the only card left me, and put the screw upon your wealthy cousin, Miss Raymond. Sorry I can't give you a copy of that remarkable photo of Olive and myself, of which, no doubt, you all know now.'

'All,' replied Allan, amazed that the man could exult in his utter and degrading villany. To him it seemed almost incredible that one who was by birth a gentleman, the son of a gallant old officer, and had been the associate of gentlemen, could fall so low as Holcroft had done, and be so callous and shameless.

'Oh, for a glass of bitter or Burton and a good cigar !' said Holcroft ; and, by the way, as you seem to speak his lingo, will you ask this old nigger in the striped counterpane why he keeps me here, and what he means to do with me ?'

Allan inquired this of Zeid in Arabic ; but to him it seemed that Hawke Holcroft totally failed to comprehend or to take it in that he was in any peril at all. As an Englishman he thought that no 'dashed foreigner' dared meddle with or molest him ; yet these Bedouins had him at their mercy sure enough ; and to judge of matters or chances by the standard of Regent Street and Piccadilly would hardly do under the summits of Jebel Dimeshk.

Remarking the tarboosh worn by Holcroft, and using Allan as an interpreter, the sheikh asked, 'Are you a Mussulman ?'

'No,' replied Holcroft, with a laugh.

'A Christian, then ?'

'No,' was the strange response.

'You must believe either in the Prophet or Christ ?'

'I believe in neither.'

'Unhappy wretch !' exclaimed the sheikh, with astonishment in his tone.

'Men may believe in both, yet follow neither.'

'So do the devils believe—and like devils tremble,' said the Bedouin.

'Well, I do not.'

'Do you feel no trust in God ?'

'None !' was the blunt and defiant reply.

'Why ?'

'He has always left me to myself.'

Allan sighed at this hopeless response, while the blasphemy of it filled the Bedouin—who, whatever his shortcomings in the way of *meum* and *tuum* were, was pious in his way—with horror and indignation. After a pause, he said : 'Look at his eyes—they are grey ; and does not the Koran say that on the last day "we shall gather the wicked together having grey eyes."'

The twentieth chapter certainly has that curious remark, for with the Arabs—a black-eyed race—to have grey eyes is the mark of an enemy or a person to be avoided.

‘You know this man in Frangistan?’ said Zeid,

‘Too well,’ replied Allan.

‘Then he has wronged thee?’ was the sharp question and suspicion of the Bedouin.

‘Deeply; he tried to kill me, indeed.’

‘Yet he lives?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why is this?’

‘I thought he was dead—drowned,’ replied Allan evasively.

‘Take this sword and smite off his head. The blade is sharp enough.’

Allan shook his head and drew back.

‘You Franks are fools!’ said Zeid, while the miserable Holcroft, though he knew not a word of what passed, guessed the terrible import of it, and glanced imploringly at Allan.

‘Do you think,’ said Zeid, after a pause, ‘that his neck is turned to ivory, as the Koran tells us that of Moses was, when he was about to be beheaded for slaying an Egyptian?’

‘The Koran — always that weary Koran!’ thought Allan impatiently.

‘Will you tell him,’ said Holcroft, ‘that, if he expects a ransom from me, I have neither a friend nor a farthing in the world?’

Allan did so.

‘Liar! may God burn thee!’ exclaimed Zeid, as he thought of the diamonds, and, acting in obedience to a sign from him, Abdallah, unknown to Holcroft, was stealing behind him, armed with a heavy and deeply curved Damascus sabre of the keenest edge.

There was a flash in the sunshine as the blade was swept round by a swift back-handed stroke, and the head of the miserable Hawke Holcroft rolled along the ground, as his body fell prostrate on it in a heap, with the red blood welling out from every vein and artery of the neck.

‘He has met his *kismet*,’ said Zeid complacently.

At this sudden catastrophe, Allan turned away horrified—utterly appalled. He had seen men wounded in every way, and mutilated too by shot and shell, but had never seen aught like this—and in cold blood, too!

‘He believed neither in the Prophet nor in Christ,’ said Zeid complacently; ‘now that he is in hell, that cemetery for lost souls, he may learn the truth.’

And, torn from the pocket of the wretched creature’s tattered surtout, the fatal diamonds were placed in the hands of Zeid-el-Ourdeh.

Allan, as he saw them sparkling in the sunshine, thought of all he heard his father say of them, and marvelled to whom they would bring evil next. If to the sheikh, he was fated never to know. It was some time before he recovered the shock this scene gave him, but it rendered his desire to be gone—to be free—irrepressible; yet he dreaded just then to approach the subject with Zeid. Whether it was the excitement of a blood-shedding or acquisition of the diamonds, or both together, Zeid was in high good humour, and about noon gave Allan a dinner unusually sumptuous in his own tent. Upon a tray of tinned copper were placed saucers of pickles, salad, and salt, with thin cakes of bread, and in the centre a dish of rice, highly seasoned with spice and saffron. Neither forks nor spoons were there, and he had to use his fingers. Thus it made him shiver to see the sheikh plunge his copper-coloured digits into the dish one moment, and thrust them half-way down his open throat the next. He always clapped his hands when he wanted any attendance. A cotton towel surrounded the tray on the ground, on which they occasionally wiped their hands; then pipes of tobacco followed, and the sheikh became sociable, as he reclined back against a saddle over which some shawls and a barracan were spread, and Allan began to cast

about in his own mind how to approach the subject of his departure.

He gathered courage from the knowledge that, after eating bread and salt together, or even salt alone, in the East, produces mutual obligations of friendship. The sheikh was a man of great piety, after his own fashion. He said his prayers five times daily, the first time being between daybreak and sunrise, turning towards Mecca, and five times daily he washed his hands. He was a firm believer in magic, and that there existed, somewhere in Upper Egypt, Ishmonie, or the Petrified City—so called on account of the great number of statues, representing men, women, children, and animals, with which its silent streets abound—all of which he believed to have been once animated creatures, miraculously changed into stone by a whisper of the Prophet, in all the various attitudes of standing, sitting, or falling, but none of which are ever visible save to true believers. He also firmly believed in the miraculous egg laid by a hen after Tel-el-Kebir, on which was inscribed the words—‘Arabi has lost the battle because he mutilated the corpses of the enemy. Allah has punished him, but He will give victory to him in the end, if he will keep the commands in the future.’

‘Ha!’ said he, after a long pull at his chibouque, ‘at Tel-el-Kebir your bare-legged men came on as hell will come at the last day.’

‘How is that?’

‘As the Koran tells us, with seventy thousand halters, each dragged by seventy thousand angels—a power nothing can withstand.’

‘Accursed as you unbelievers are,’ said he, after a pause, ‘God seems to give you a wondrous power, even as He gave Solomon the gift of miracles in a degree greater than anyone before him; the animals and the vegetables obeyed him, and he was carried by the winds of heaven above the stars therein.’

and his power over the genii was by a seal ring, of which one part was brass and the other iron, and upon it was graven the great name of God. Yes, though unbelievers, you are swift in action as the pigeons of Aleppo; not like the Osmanli, who would catch hares in waggons,' he added, with reference to the proverbial slowness of the Turks.

'Sheikh,' said Allan, in his most persuasive manner, 'you know that I befriended you when in sore peril.'

'Yes, as my brother would have done,' said Zeid, his expressive face lighting up and his black eyes sparkling under the hood of his burnous, as he pointed with his left hand to his right shoulder, which had been slashed by the long sword of one of our Life Guardsmen.

'Well, in memory of that you will allow me to depart home freely to my people?'

'Why? Are you not comfortable enough here? Is not one place that God has made as good as another? And who and what are your people? With all their skill and power, they are but wretched unbelievers, who go to battle with their legs bare, accompanied by bags of devils, that squall and groan, like those who strove to defame Solomon.'

'Do be just, sheikh!' urged Allan.

'I shall—is not justice the sister of piety?'

'You will allow me to go, then?'

'I have not said so. Why leave the desert and go back to cities, where men become intoxicated with the pleasures of this life, and forget that which is to come?'

Allan sighed. By this time he was weary of the sheikh and his stilted conversation.

Beginning with the inevitable aphorism, 'There is only one God and Mohammed is his Prophet,' the sheikh, after a pause, continued thus between long whiffs of his cherry-stick pipe: 'Stay with us and pray with us five times a day, each time turning to the Kebbah; eat not in the daytime during the whole

feast of Ramadan, make the pilgrimage to Mecca, give alms to the widow and the orphan. These are the sources from which all goodness springs. Stay with us and do all these things. Become my brother indeed—a son of the desert. Why go back among the accursed Franks? You know how to use the sword, the spear, and the rifle. Stay with us; we shall give you a rich pelisse, a good blood mare, and a Bedouin girl, beautiful, good, and virtuous.'

This programme scarcely suited the views of the Master of Aberfeldie, but the situation was such a grave one that he dared not laugh at it.

'But you need not go to Mecca,' said the sheikh, as an afterthought.

'Why?'

'God is everywhere—why seek Him at Mecca, when we have Him here in the desert?'

Allan pleaded hard, and spoke of bribes and ransom, but apparently in vain, and he began to get sorely perplexed by the prospect before him, especially if the tribe took their departure—of which there was every prospect—in search of 'pastures new' further from Grand Cairo, and towards the plain of Muggreh. He was obliged to dissemble his disgust and mortification, and could only hope of finding an opportunity of 'making,' as he thought, 'a clean bolt of it.'

A few uneventful days passed, and during these he could not help being struck with the simplicity of the domestic life and manner of the Sheikh Zeid-el-Ourdeh and his family. Though the commander of more than six hundred horse, he did not disdain to saddle and bridle his own steed, or to give him his barley and chopped straw. In his humble tent his wife made the coffee, kneaded the dough, and cooked all the victuals, though a kind of princess in the desert and among her people. His daughters and kinswomen attended to the linen, and, closely veiled, went to the wells or springs for water, with

classic-looking pitchers of brown ware balanced on their gracefully carried heads—in ways, manners, and ideas all unchanged from those described by Homer, or as we find them in the history of Abraham and in Genesis.

It was while a prisoner thus with Zeid that Allan heard the strange story promulgated by Arabi, that all Egyptians who fell fighting for the faith would come back to earth as spirits mounted on snow-white horses and armed with miraculous swords, to completely exterminate the British—an idea evidently borrowed from the Koran, which ascribes Mohamed's victory at Bedr to his having as allies three thousand spirits led by the angel Gabriel mounted on his horse Haizum. On this subject the Paris *Temps* recorded that an Arab servant belonging to their correspondent asked the latter whether he had seen any of the returned spirits from Kassassin in recent encounters, and, on being answered in the negative, declared that the correspondent could not see them because he was *not* an Englishman.

CHAPTER XLVIII.—THE LAST OF SIR PAGET.

AND now to glance homeward at more civilized scenes—to the catastrophe at Hurdell Hall. The terrible tidings were soon made known to Eveline that Sir Paget, on the homeward ride from Furzydown, had been suddenly seized by an unaccountable fit of irritation, and, in defiance of all advice and entreaty, though a bad horseman, had lashed and spurred the bay hunter—a vicious brute—while needlessly rushing it at a high fence, and been thrown with terrible violence. In short, his neck was broken, and he had died on the spot without pain. A door had been procured from an adjoining barnyard, and on this humble bier the body had been brought to the Hall.

As one in a dreadful dream Eveline listened to all this, and the awful shadow of something—*something* as yet unthought of and unconceived—fell blackly and bleakly across the dark horizon of her life, as she saw the body borne past her—the body

she shrank from touching—borne past her indoors ; and a darker shadow would yet fall when she learned the news from Egypt. Weakened by all she had undergone hitherto, and overcome by the sudden horror of the present event, Eveline could scarcely stand.

‘ You cannot go up the staircase to bed,’ said Lucretia Hurdell kindly.

‘ Oh—yes ; yes, I can,’ replied Eveline, with dry lips.

But she sank in a heap on the Persian carpet.

‘ Lift her up, Harry,’ said his sister.

Harry was only too ready, and raised her at once in his strong arms.

‘ Oh, please to put me down,’ said Eveline imploringly ; ‘ don’t touch me—I can walk.’

‘ Nonsense, dear Lady Puddicombe—you must permit me,’ he urged.

And holding the helpless girl close to him—so close as to preclude all attempted resistance on her part—he bore her steadily upstairs, and past the room where *it* lay, covered with a sheet, and straight to a new apartment prepared for her, followed by his sister and Clairette.

The fast, horsey baronet’s breath mingled with hers, but unconsciously for her, poor girl ! Her soft face reclined on his shoulder, and he saw just then, more than ever, how fair and delicate—how very lovely she was ; and he began to develop—or scheme out—some very ambitious plans of his own. Hurdell Hall and the Hurdell estates were rather deeply dipped, and thus ‘ Old Pudd’s money, even if encumbered by such a lovely bride, would be very acceptable when the time came.’

So thought Sir Harry, with the man—but a few hours dead—lying stark and stiff within a few yards of him. Fortunately for Eveline, ‘ Nature’s innocent opium, fatigue ’—with her it was fatigue of mind—procured her some sleep ; thus she was supposed to be the better able for what she would be compelled

to hear on the morrow, as a telegram had arrived from Lady Aberfeldie—addressed to her—a document that, as Sir Harry said, ‘proved a regular floorer, by Jove!’

In the morning he said, ‘She must not be told, as yet, of what yesterday’s paper contained—the mysterious disappearance of her brother, to whom she seems most tenderly attached.’

‘But how about the telegram from Southsea?’ asked Lucretia. ‘No doubt it refers to that event. Indeed, we do not know what it contains, good or bad news. It must be given to her; we have no right to conceal or keep it back, and may commit mischief by doing so.’

Sir Harry tugged his straw-coloured moustache with an air of perplexity, and said, while busy with coffee and game-pie, ‘By all means, then; if Lady Puddicombe is to know about her brother—which, I fear, will cut her up more than poor old Puddicombe’s catastrophe—there is no one who can break the news to her better than you, Lucretia.’

‘How?’

‘You are such a precious cool hand, don’t you know.’

Miss Hurdell looked as if this was not very flattering, but quitted the luxurious breakfast-table, saying, ‘Poor thing, she is not fit to hear any more bad news; she has such a worn-out look already.’

The telegram *did* refer to Allan—a most unwise mode of breaking such terrible intelligence—but Lady Aberfeldie never doubted that her daughter must have seen the public prints.

Eveline uttered a low wail, and fainted. A cry of terror escaped Clairette, who drew away the pillows from under her mistress’s head, opened the collar of her laced night-dress, to let the air play freely about her delicate neck and white bosom, while she bathed her temples freely with Rimmel and eau-de-Cologne; and Miss Hurdell, whose nature was somewhat hard, and who had never seen anyone faint before, looked on with some fear and suspicion, as animation slowly came

back to the lovely face, with gasping sobs on the lips and heavy respirations, which made her bosom heave and fall. George Eliot says, with truth, 'It is a wonderful moment the first time we stand by one who has fainted, and witness the fresh birth of consciousness spreading itself over the blank features like the rising sunlight on the Alpine summits that lay ghastly and dead under the leaden twilight. A slight shudder, and the frost-bound eyes recover their liquid light ; for an instant they show the inward semi-consciousness of an infant, then with a little start they open wider, and begin to *look*, the present is visible, but only as a strange writing, and the interpreter memory is not yet there.'

The dull mental agony that comes after acute anguish or a great shock proved too much for Eveline now, and she became prostrate, seriously ill in the hands of her new friends, and Clairette wrote instantly to Olive Raymond. Eveline at times burst into passionate sobs, then she would lie very still with her long lashes closed and the tears oozing from under them, slowly down her pale cheeks, though her slender throat would be agitated by those after-sobs that seem so uncontrollable. Other times she would lie perfectly still, lost in deep thought, as she pictured all the past and tender love her manly brother had ever borne her, and how gently he pitied her, when he discovered her love for the lost Evan Cameron.

'The devil!' said Sir Harry to himself, as he smoked a cigar on the terrace under her windows, and looked up there from time to time and twirled his long fair moustache ; 'who could have imagined all this ! She must have loved that old fellow after all.'

'In the light of a father, perhaps,' suggested Mr. Pyke Poole.

'Of course—you are right ; how else could she have looked upon him. Her sorrow must be for her brother.'

'Perhaps both.'

'Who the devil are all those cads crossing the park ?' ex-

claimed Sir Harry, with sudden anger, perhaps at his friend's mild suggestion.

‘The coroner’s inquest.’

The latter was ‘a thundering bore’ to Sir Harry, who was provoked to see ‘a parcel of louts in half-bullet hats’ gaping about the Hall. However, the matter was soon over; permission was given for the interment, and, after unlimited brandies-and-sodas in the butler’s premises, they all departed in high good humour with themselves. Lord Aberfeldie came to attend the funeral, and brought with him Olive to remain with Eveline. Lady Aberfeldie did not think the Hurdells ‘good form,’ so she remained, as yet, at Southsea.

Eveline’s father and cousin were shocked by the expression of her face. Intense mental pain seemed written on her brow; and her eyes, if sunk and inflamed, seemed to have gathered much of intensity. The stipulated number of days allowed by custom to elapse between the day of death and that of interment were over, and the funeral too; Lord Aberfeldie, Sir Harry, Mr. Pyke Poole, and many others in scarfs and hat-bands of wonderful length, had departed with the remains for Slough-cum-Sloggit by train, and some of their carriages were now returning through the sunshiny park, where the soft rain was falling, and, as the clouds were breaking up, bright gleams of radiance danced along the sward.

Unused to death, and unsympathetic, Lucretia Hurdell felt intense relief. The great Tudor hall, with all its window-blinds down and shrouded in silence and gloom, had seemed to her for all these days like one large sepulchre, though an odour of hothouse flowers was everywhere, as the gardener brought all his treasures—hyacinths, waxen camellias, gardenia, faint Dijon roses, and so forth—to decorate the corridor, the death-chamber, and the coffin, while, unconscious of all the mischief he had wrought, the bay hunter enjoyed his corn and beans as usual. So the coffin was laid in ‘the family vault,’

where lay the first baronet of the House of Puddicombe and the first wife of Sir Paget.

‘I shall never lie there,’ thought Eveline, with a shudder, when her father, before returning to Southsea, gave her the final details. Poor Sir Paget was gone, but no one seemed sad about it, and everyone seemed to grow bright now that he *was* gone finally. Sunshine and air came freely into the house through the open windows now, and the nameless hush that for days had pervaded the vicinity of the dead was no longer necessary. The decorous sadness that was acted, even in the servants’ hall, imposed by the presence of death—especially the death of a very rich man—was no longer required. The butler might whistle as he cleaned the plate, the housemaids might laugh freely now, and Mademoiselle Clairette indulge in a merry little French chanson unchecked by that rigid matron in black moire, the housekeeper.

CHAPTER XLIX.—THE YOUNG WIDOW.

So one of the closing scenes of a sudden tragedy had been acted in that fine old English manor-house, standing amid its richly wooded chase, the undulating sward of which was of such a brilliant emerald that it reminded those who saw it that Hurdell Hall stood in the most fertile part of Hampshire. When Sir Harry invited Sir Paget to visit him and join him in the fatal—as it eventually proved—cub-hunting, his object had been a nefarious one, but quite adapted to the tone of a *blasé* man about town like himself, the hope of engaging the beautiful young wife of his elderly club friend in a very decided case of flirtation—so ignorant was he of Eveline’s character, and how her ill-assorted marriage was brought about.

Now he hoped by a more honourable course to secure both her purse and person. By will, however, it was soon known that Sir Paget, to prevent a younger successor enjoying any of

his pelf through her, had stripped her of everything but what he had been compelled to settle upon her for life. However, Sir Harry thought she was every way a most desirable widow to win, but her sorrow and sadness were a sore worry to Lucretia.

‘Don’t weep, dear,’ she would say, in that hard, sharp tone peculiar to some selfish women. ‘It is the worst possible thing for one’s eyes in every way.’

And, sooth to say, Miss Hurdell’s cold, steely orbs did not seem even to have been much afflicted with the weakness of weeping.

‘Ah! we all have our trials, dear Lady Puddicombe,’ she resumed, after a pause. ‘Do try to bear this patiently, and believe it all for—all for——’

‘All for what?’

‘Well—the best.’

‘The best—how, Miss Hurdell?’

‘Well—he was so old and you so young, don’t you see,’ replied this very matter-of-fact person.

Free—for whom and to what extent? Eveline never viewed the dispensation of Providence thus; but, till Olive came with her soothing presence, every night amid the darkness of her room, the pent-up tempest in her bosom—the tempest of un-availing regrets—would burst forth with loud whispers and sobs till sleep came, as it always did, at last.

Before Olive arrived, Lucretia was ever by the bedside of her ‘sweet Eveline,’ sitting for hours together, putting eau-de-Cologne on her handkerchiefs, and Rimmel on her temples, arranging her pillow or her footstool if she left her couch for a chair, telling her stories of foreign life at Naples, Homburg, and Monaco, and so forth, for she believed that Eveline had been left with a splendid jointure, and a Scottish estate by a former lover; while Sir Harry lounged about impatiently in the stables and kennels, with his briar-root, and

thinking 'when will all this end? And *how* can she go on as she does about that old pump?' But a little time before Eveline had been unconscious of any special blessedness in her life; *now*—with regard to the fate of her brother and Evan Cameron—it seemed as if the restoration of the past, even while encumbered with captious, fretful, and jealous old Sir Paget, would be worth years of happiness.

'Oh, my brother—my brother Allan? Were there not wicked people enough in the world to be taken, that you must be reft from us?'

And these words found a terrible echo in the heart of Olive. More weary and empty than ever did life look to both these girls. Everyone seemed to have some one to love them—some object in life to engross them—but neither of them had any now.

'If I could only die—if I could only die!' Eveline would murmur, as she tossed her sweet face and dishevelled hair on her pillow, and thought of that grave in the desert, and betrayed a frame of mind beyond the conception of mundane Lucretia Hurdell.

And her mind would go back to the old days with all their brightness at Dundargue and in Mayfair, before Sir Paget came into the family picture, and when pleasure seemed all her thought and occupation, and care quite beyond her province! And the girl lay there thinking—thinking—it was impossible for her not to think and surmise. But for this sudden accident, how long might Sir Paget have lived at his years; and how long would he have tormented her about Evan? As if to infer that she desired his death, how often had he said in the bitterness of his heart, before the news of Cameron's fall in action came, that 'he would cheat her yet, and live as long as she could do!'

She was free now, and not past her girlhood; and, if in life, Evan would be loving her still. But she thrust that natural

thought aside ; why brood over it now, when Evan was no more ? for somehow there seemed in it a species of treason to her dead husband—little as she had loved him—now that he too was in his grave. If this was her mode of viewing Evan Cameron, how little chance had Sir Harry Hurdell of affecting her heart !

Now that Sir Paget was gone, Eveline repented that his last thoughts of her as a wife had been bitter, and tried to think of him as a friend who had been kind at one time, a husband whose settlements had been generous, and would have been greater but for the jealousy that made him alter his will. She now recalled with something like an emotion of pleasure, or certainly of satisfaction, that though she did not love, she had ever respected him, though his references to Evan Cameron had always made her wince and shiver.

‘Poor man !’ she exclaimed ; ‘and his soul went out into the night—in a moment—without time for a prayer or supplication to God !’

‘So did the souls of our brave fellows at Tel-el-Kebir and elsewhere,’ replied Olive, who had rather more metal in her composition than the softer Eveline.

Olive knew enough of life and of human nature to feel certain that her cousin was too young to relinquish all the hopes and fears, the many vague and brilliant dreams of girlhood. Another would come, but *who* ? Time would show that.

‘She’ll get over all this nonsense by-and-by, poor little thing,’ said Sir Harry to his chum, Pyke Poole, as they knocked the balls about in the billiard-room, trying cannons and so forth for practice. ‘She is, by Jove, the best groomed woman in the whole stud of our acquaintances—perfect in all her points. I’ll go in for her, if I can ; but it is too soon to begin the running yet. Girls’ fancies are, however, easily drawn from one object to another.’

‘And I don’t think she could have fancied old Pudd much,’

said Poole, as he mixed himself a glass of brandy-and-soda. 'I've seen many a rough spill in the field, but never such a devil of a cropper as he came !'

'You know I might do worse than marry such a sweet girl, Pyke?'

'You might, by Jingo !' replied Mr. Poole, with a knowing wink, and thinking, Why should not he himself enter stakes for such a prize?'

'Puddicombe's settlements are splendid, I hear, but pass away if she dies without an heir. No chance of *that*, I think ; and then some soft-headed Scotch fellow—if there is such a thing in the world—who loved her, has left her a place in the Highlands, where one could knock over the grouse and blackcock every year. We'll get married before the Derby. She'll have had plenty of time to air her grief and her weeds—Jay's "unutterable woe," no doubt—for old Pudd by that time. I've a heavy bet upon Dasher, and I'll have her in the grand stand on Cup Day, with my jockey's colours somewhere about her dress. She'll look, as she always does, a stunner !'

Poole could not help laughing as his friend ran on thus, in perfect confidence, and stroked his long yellow moustache. Though rather a bit of a reprobate, Sir Harry looked every inch a gentleman, a long-limbed sanguine blond, alternately blunt and overbearing, resolute and indolent, with the general air of a man who has seen everything that was to be seen—done everything that was to be done, and 'had found nothing in it.'

'To speak to her for a space would never do. I'll take my time,' he resumed ; 'none but a fool meets trouble half-way.'

She would learn to love him in time—hang it all, how could she resist ! This comfortable impression made him feel quite easy on the subject, and by degrees the satisfaction that always accompanies a weak mind took possession of him. Olive never doubted that when Eveline got over the death, not of Sir Paget, but of Evan Cameron, she would marry again. She was

too young to treasure a morbid grief; but Olive would not like to have seen her Lady of Hurdell Hall, for, with all a woman's sharp instincts, she had indefinable doubts about Sir Harry. After Olive joined her, the two girls were never weary of comparing their hopeless notes and sorrows and of searching the public prints. Eveline could do so freely and unchidden now for any further meagre tidings that might come of the lost one. An unexpected and startling event—to be detailed in its place—*did* happen, and was duly recorded, but was unnoticed by them; and those who did see it, cared not to speak or write of it, while others were unaware of the deep and vital interest it possessed for them both.

'Dear Olive, but for you coming to me I think I might have lost my life—my reason—certainly my peace of mind—everything!' exclaimed the affectionate and effusive Eveline, wreathing her soft white arms round her cousin's neck, and nestling her face therein.

The first day she was 'downstairs' was quite an event at Hurdell Hall, so great was the fuss made of her by the baronet and his sister. In her dressing-room she had been fully attired in her crape dress by Clairette, who might as well have dressed a lay figure for all the apparent power of volition there was in Eveline. Again and again she had tried to bathe her cheeks into some colour, to smooth her hair, and went with slow reluctant steps to the drawing-room at last; and there the extreme depth of her mourning, her girlish face and figure, and her pure whiteness of complexion—the soft white of the arum lily—made her delicate beauty seem more striking than ever.

Sir Harry was beside himself with pleasure, and when he rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room after dinner, and after all the champagne he had imbibed at table, his attention and extreme effusiveness were such that Eveline was compelled at last to say coldly, 'Sir Harry, I wish you would go away and leave me—leave me to my own thoughts.'

He urged his extreme joy at seeing her again after her long seclusion.

Eveline had now a horror of Hurdell Hall. It was associated in her mind with three dire calamities : Evan's death—though she had first heard of that from Sir Harry in London ; Sir Paget's terrible catastrophe, and, collaterally with it, the strange disappearance of her darling brother. She must get away, without delay, she thought, as the atmosphere of the place seemed to oppress her. So, in a few days, arrangements were complete for her departure to join her parents, who were still at Southsea. Well, that was not a thousand miles from Hurdell Hall, thought Sir Harry ; and it was too soon to venture on the subject of love or marriage yet ; but a time would come, and a jolly one he doubted not it would be. But, ere that time came, some very unforeseen events had come to pass with reference to Eveline.

CHAPTER L.—IN THE DESERT.

ALLAN had heard of Private Thomas Keith, of the 72nd Highlanders, who, after being taken prisoner in Egypt in 1807, rose to the rank of Aga of the Mamelukes and Governor of Medina ; but the prospects of promotion in the desert, held out to him by Zeid, did not prove very attractive ; and here we may mention that the name of Zeid is of great antiquity, for it was that of the adopted son of Mohammed, whom he placed on the Black Stone of the Caaba, and to whom he gave a wife named Zinab.

Zeid's wife had already suggested that Allan should have his head shaved, and that a turban or tarboosh should be substituted for his tropical helmet, with its red 42nd hackle ; so he began to think that something must be done to put an end to this life of idleness and annoyance. At times he thought he would affect to fall into the views of Zeid-el-Ourdeh ; get the

blood mare and put a burnous over his regimental jacket and kilt, and—leaving the ‘Bedouin girl’ out of the category—take an opportunity of trying the speed of the said mare and escaping. But the time for departing further into the desert drew near, and no mare was given him; he had, however, the offer of a camel, but that would not do at all. He thought of the distress his disappearance must cause his family—if deemed dead, their sorrow; and ere long the deletion of his name from the army list, and from his position in what he deemed a family regiment, and the whole complication of the situation maddened him. In that Bedouin band were hundreds of dusky robbers, with whom he had *not* eaten the mystic bread and salt of the East, and who owed him neither favour nor protection; and thus the grotesque views and oppressive friendship of Zeid might fail to secure his life at their hands. He knew that they would think no more of killing him than of killing a kid, and he recalled with sufficient disgust the swift catastrophe of the wretched Holcroft.

When rambling on the skirts of the black-tented camp, under close surveillance, however, Allan observed that the tomb of the Santon had a remarkably broad and peculiar cornice round its dome, that it was curved upward like the rim of a billycock hat, and that a vine tendril of considerable strength had ascended, in the lapse of years, from the base to the summit of the dome; and thus he conceived, if he could ascend thereinto unseen, he might lie *perdue*, till the tribe departed, and then he should be safe. The day before the tents were to be struck, Zeid ordered some food to be procured by his huntsmen, who—though the food of the tribe was generally farinaceous—succeeded in capturing some of these gazelles that live in the open plain, where they browse upon the saline and pungent herbage. Fully experienced in the haunts and habits of these animals, Abdallah and others concealed themselves in a hollow dug out of the sand, and carefully covered over with brambles, and

there they captured their prey by means of a rude network attached to stakes—the former being slightly concealed in the sand, and raised by means of a rope pulled when a number of the herd has ventured within its precincts. Thus twenty or thirty of these beautiful creatures, with their bright hazel eyes, spiral horns, and slender limbs were taken at a time. The gun was used only when other means failed, as ammunition is too costly for ordinary occasions in obtaining the supplies of food. Allan, while hovering about the huntsmen, effected a final reconnaissance of the Santon's tomb, and resolved to make the attempt that very night.

When sudden darkness fell as usual, instantly after sunset, and no moon as yet had risen, while Zeid and his family were busy with their final ablutions and prayers, Allan—his bold heart beating wildly the while—crept softly out of the tent, under the uplifted canvas wall thereof, and crawling flatly on his hands and knees, with the blade of his drawn sword in his teeth, began to leave the hated encampment behind him. It was a time of keen and poignant excitement. Every moment he expected to hear an outcry announcing that he was missed from his place, or seen, even amid the gloom and obscurity, by the keen eye of some practised son of the desert. Fortunately all were at their prayers or engaged in preparations for departure on the morrow, and, as the distance increased between himself and the dark camp, his spirit began to rise, and he thought to himself, why had he not made this attempt before? But, sooth to say, it would have been impossible, as he was less watched latterly than he had been at first. Even at the distance of half a mile he did not assume an erect attitude, lest his figure might be seen between the sky and horizon, but continued to creep steadily on, till at last he ventured to rise from the ground, and strode swiftly towards the tomb of the Santon, which was about two miles from the camp. The stars were coming out now, and a sigh of relief escaped him as he reached it—a sigh that ended

in an exclamation of dismay as a tall Bedouin, who seemed to spring from the ground, so sudden was his appearance, stood face to face with him, and in a moment he recognised Abdallah, the second in command under Zeid ! He perceived Allan's sword in his hand, and, knowing that he was escaping, drew a pistol from his girdle—a pistol the explosion of which would have proved most disastrous, but by one trenchant stroke Allan hewed the Arab's left hand off by the wrist, and hand and pistol fell on the sand together.

Muttering a terrible malediction, the Bedouin, wrapping the bleeding stump in the folds of his burnous, furiously assailed Allan with his formidable sabre, shouting, as he did so, something to this purpose : ' Unbelieving wretch, you shall go from hence to hell, where your hands will be chained to your neck, and you will be compelled to oppose your face to the flames !'

' Oho !' thought Allan, ' the Koran again !'

If he had time or means to give an alarm, all would be over. It was a life for a life now, and both men fought desperately ; both were expert swordsmen, and both were filled with blackest fury—the Bedouin by the agony of his wound, and Allan by the peril which menaced him.

After pausing to draw breath for a moment, Abdallah came rushing on with blind rage ; Allan warded a cut, and, closing in, caught his sword-hand by the wrist, and held it with an iron grasp ; then, adroitly dropping the basket hilt of the claymore from his right hand, he caught the shortened blade and plunged it, dagger-fashion, into the breast of the Arab, who fell at his feet and expired. Inspired by an instant thought, he dragged the dead body away, and the hand and pistol also, to some distance from the vicinity of the tomb, and, returning, proceeded stealthily and speedily, if worn, breathless, and feeling rather sick by his recent work, to climb by the branches of the vine up the wall of the circular edifice, and over its heavily curved cornice, behind which he crouched down flat, and there

he lay for hours, exposed to a shower of rain, the fall of which he hailed with thankfulness, as it would obliterate any traces of blood in his vicinity, and also his footmarks from the bruised branches of the vine which he had used as a ladder. He knew that, if retaken now, the discovery of Abdallah's fate would seal his own; so, if found, nothing was left him but to die sword in hand. Each respiration came heavily, as he lay there listening for every passing sound, and wondering how he had achieved the first chapter of his escape, and all the bloody and necessary work so well. Strange it was that his hand should avenge the miserable Holcroft; but he did not think of that till afterwards; nor did he think of the too baleful effect the wet and damp of the Egyptian night might have upon his own health.

At length the rain ceased, and the blue dome of heaven appeared in all its wondrous beauty—for wondrous indeed it is by the shores of the Nile, though this was in the first season of the Egyptian year, when the weather is generally moist. But the sky is so cloudless, and the brightness of the moon so intense, that the natives, when sleeping in the open air, as they often do, cover their eyes, as the effect of the moon's rays upon the sight is more dangerous and violent than that of the sun. No sleep, however, visited the eyes of Allan that night; he remained without desire to close them, preternaturally, acutely, and painfully awake, and watchful as a lynx. It was all as Allan anticipated. Day had scarcely dawned, and the striking of the tents begun, ere he was conscious that his absence was discovered, and more than a hundred swiftly mounted horsemen, with cries and shouts, darted from the camp in every direction around it in search, and, if afoot, he must inevitably have been overtaken; but, concealed where he was, he lay in safety, though his heart throbbed so violently that he seemed to hear its pulsations, as he heard the Bedouins, at full speed, pass and repass the Santon's tomb, with guns and

rifles unslung, intent on his recapture and destruction. He clenched the hilt of his claymore. If traced to where he lay—if discovered—he could but sell his life, and dearly did he resolve to do so! He heard their voices, their surmises, their suggestions, and their threats; and lucky it was for him that the rain, and subsequently the heavy dew, of the past night had obliterated the traces of his footsteps near the tomb and on the tendrils of the vine, also the traces of the blood of Abdallah, the discovery of whose body was greeted by yells of rage that pierced the air; but the rain and the dew were ere long to have a baleful effect on Allan in the time to come. At last the riders seemed to give up the search as hopeless, and by twos and threes came slowly back to camp, with horses weary and bridles loose. After mid-day, the tents were finally struck, stowed away, with all household utensils, on the backs of camels and horses, and the whole tribe of Zeid-el-Ourdeh took its departure in a north-easterly direction, towards the great desert, through which lies the route taken by Bonaparte in 1799, and, before evening fell, the last of them, like black specks, were alone visible, and ere long they quite disappeared from view.

Now Allan, worn and weary, after a day without food or drink, slept for a time, and the moon, clear, bright, and refulgent, was high in the heavens when he prepared to descend from his lurking-place. He looked keenly, anxiously, and carefully round him, as it was possible that some of the Bedouins might return to their late camping-ground for some object of their own; and, moreover, others were to be avoided quite as much as they. No living thing was visible, and the most awful silence seemed to reign around him.

Allan descended from his perch, stiff, benumbed, and well-nigh powerless, to begin his lonely and perilous journey; but whither?

Ignorant of the country and of the way to pursue, he knew

not that the canal which leads from Belbeis to Grand Cairo lay on his left ; and after toiling on without adventure for a few days and nights, subsisting on dates, wild beans, and lotus roots, with a little water from an occasional spring, he found himself, weary, worn, and faint, with pains in his head and loins, and shivering in his limbs—the forerunners of a deadly illness—crossing what is the camel-route to Suez, as he penetrated into another portion of the desert.

He saw occasionally vultures, storks, and pelicans ; and now and then a herd of beautiful antelopes swept past him ; but—as he thanked Heaven—no Bedouins. More than once he came upon nitre springing up in the sandy waste, like crystallized fruit. At times these spots seemed as if overgrown by moss and coated with hoar-frost—hoar-frost under a fervid Egyptian sun ; and, according to the quantity of the nitre, their fantastic shapes were either a dazzling white or more or less tinted by the yellow hue of the sand.

More than once in his fitful slumbers by night under the baleful dew, there came before him in a dream the agony of his lurking on the summit of the tomb in momentary dread of discovery, and then he was again closing in combat hand-in-hand with Abdallah, the aspect of whose dark face, with gleaming eyes and glistening teeth, curiously blended with an idea of Holcroft, came vividly before him ; and then, when just in the act of plunging in his shortened sword-blade, he would awake with a nervous start to find himself still in solitude, with quiet stars looking down upon him.

At last, when about to sink, he saw before him the well-known fringes of greenery and foliage that indicate the line of a canal, and it proved to be a portion of that of Moses, and a cry of joy escaped him when he heard the whistle of a locomotive and saw the welcome smoke of a train running westward.

How much the sound and sight we deem alike so hideous spoke to his heart of home, of ease, of peace, safety, and civili-

zation. In short, he soon discovered that he was midway between Kassassin and Mahsameh, and by a liberal promise of *backsheesh* to an Egyptian labourer whom he met, and whose assistance he solicited, he reached a railway station and obtained all the succour he needed from the European officials there.

By them he was placed in a train for Ismailia, and ere long he saw once more those places which were familiar to him as having passed them with the troops—Ramses, Tel-el-Mahuta, and El-Magfar, where the Black Watch had encamped, and where he had befriended Zeid-el-Ourdeh; and ere long he could recognise, when he had left the sea of sand behind him, the white-walled houses of Ismailia against the deep blue of the sky, and the tall forest of masts, those of our transports and war-ships in the adjoining Lake of Timsah.

He had no recollection of more, or even of reaching the railway station. His heart beat wildly, his head swam round him, and a darkness seemed to envelop him. He had fainted.

On partially recovering, he found himself in bed, but he knew not where, and dimly seen, as in a glass, he thought he saw Evan Cameron bending over him—Evan looking pale and wan as when he buried him in the sand.

‘O God,’ sighed Allan, as he closed his eyes to shut the vision out, ‘is this madness or delirium that has come upon me?’

CHAPTER LI.—EASTWARD HO!

LADY ABERFELDIE was a Scottish Episcopalian of the first class—one whose boast it was that she always distinguished Christmas and Easter by mince-pies and cheesecakes; and who rather looked down on English Ritualists and Tractarians as ‘second chop’; and who never saw a Michaelmas without its goose; but she forgot the Michaelmas of this year, and with good reason too.

The sudden arrival in the hospital at Ismailia of Captain Graham, the missing officer of the Black Watch, who had been carried off by Bedouins at Matarieh, and who was supposed to have shared the terrible fate of Professor Palmer and his companions, was duly 'wired' home, like many other items of Egyptian news, and caused no small excitement among the inmates of Puddicombe Villa, Southsea. The telegram added that he was without a wound, but was supposed to be dying of enteric fever, the result of all he had undergone when in the desert.

'Dying!' exclaimed his mother, pale as a lily; 'oh, it cannot be!'

And Olive looked the picture of mute misery.

Lord Aberfeldie telegraphed to the chief of the medical staff at Ismailia for distinct intelligence, and the reply—waited for with intense anxiety—came in its usual orange-tinted envelope.

'Not dying yet, but recovery very improbable.'

Lord Aberfeldie, with the promptitude of an old soldier, and full of affection and anxiety, wished to start at once for Egypt, and alone; but the three ladies of his family insisted on going also, so he yielded to their tears, entreaties, and importunities—especially those of Olive, whose misery was very great; and he had much sympathy with a young and loving heart. 'Let no one decry the suffering of the young because they are young,' says a writer; as we grow older we get used to pain, both mental and bodily.

Olive passed the hours, previous to departure, pretty much as we do those which precede a funeral; everything was done as a duty, dressing, undressing, sitting down to meals, and so forth—seeming to have no interest in anything, as if, for the time, life and all its interests was over and done with.

'Oh, Eveline,' she exclaimed, 'what advantages men have over us in this world.'

'Of course they have,' replied her cousin, 'but to what do you refer in the present instance?'

‘Now, if we were men, we could start for Egypt alone; as it is, we can only go with your papa.’

‘If you were a man, Olive, you would not think of going at all.’

‘Indeed—why?’

‘Little goose! If a man, would you be engaged to Allan? Are you going to become an advocate for women’s “rights” —whatever they may be?’

‘No—but it is tiresome to have to run in the grooves of life that men lay down for us. Poor creatures, we are only in their eyes the weaker vessels after all.’

‘But weaker vessels they make a great fuss with; but how we chatter! O Heavens, if Allan’s peril—dear, dear Allan—should be so great!’

Olive shivered at this exclamation, as she alternated—like all girls of a delicate and nervous organization—between high spirits at the prospect of going eastward and the awful dread of what tidings *might* await her there.

‘Going to the East—actually to Egypt! Darling papa, how shall we ever be able to thank you?’ exclaimed Eveline, as in her energy she locked her slender fingers so tightly together that the great diamond in one of her rings—a gift of Sir Paget—was cutting into her delicate skin, and yet she felt it not.

And great was the disgust of Sir Harry Hurdell, when eventually he heard of this sudden disposition to travel, the precise object of which he failed quite to understand.

Apart from anxiety about her brother, Eveline had another thought, and she kept repeating to herself, ‘I shall see the land where Evan died—the land that holds his grave! It is a pilgrimage of love—but one that is without deceit to him.’

‘Him’ meant Sir Paget, or ‘Old Pudd,’ as Sir Harry called him.

Allan might die ere they arrived, or after they did so. In either case, the famous will of Olive’s father would be as only

so much waste paper, so far as the Aberfeldie family was concerned ; but at this time of trial no one thought of that feature in the terrible contingency. Their whole idea was to see him ; to be with him ; to know the best or worst ; to nurse him well, and to bring him home with them to the soft breezes of the Sidlaw Hills and his native place, Dundargue.

So Tappleton and Mademoiselle Clairette received their orders ; packing was proceeded with ; the Continental Bradshaw consulted, and all arrangements made for a speedy departure for Egypt, *viâ* Paris ; by rail then to Marseilles ; thence by steamer, Messageries Impériales Company, to Alexandria, when the train could be taken for Suez. The night before their departure Olive was so excited that she could not go to bed, but sat listening to the booming of the waves as they rolled on the stormy bluffs of Southsea Castle, while all the past returned upon her, and when she had last seen the face of Allan. As she was heard moving about in her room, Clairette was sent to inquire for her.

‘I have a dreadful headache,’ said Olive.

‘Mon Dieu, mademoiselle, why are you not in bed, instead of shivering there in your night-dress, at an open window, too ! This will never do ; let me coil up your hair and cover you up.’

‘Dear little Clairette, I shall be good and go to bed—yes, to bed.’

Clairette, who knew all about it, kissed her lady’s hand ; but Olive pressed her lips to the cheek of the French girl, who, in the impulsiveness of her nature, burst into tears, and then, instead of leaving her mistress to repose, had a long gossip with her about Allan, for whose safety she said she gave up a prayer every night.

Appliances for travel are so great and ample now that a few hours after soon saw the whole party on board the Marseilles steamer, and traversing the Mediterranean.

Many officers were in the saloon, making their way to join

the various regiments, and to these Eveline—so young a widow—was an object of no small interest. She seemed to have ripened into the bloom of early womanhood, though all her girlish manner remained with its softness and grace. Her figure had become more rounded and developed; her step was firm, though elastic as ever; and she carried her head with an air of stateliness that was somewhat belied by the occasional sadness of her expression and lassitude of demeanour. To her and to Olive, ever-recurring was the thought, when fairly off the coast of Egypt, how strange it was from the steamer's poop to look upon those places of which they had read so much of late in the newspapers—Alexandria, Suez, Port Saïd, and so forth—all 'household words' at home now.

At the first-named place they saw ample traces of the terrible bombardment, with the details of which they were more familiar than with those of its marble palaces and porphyry temples of the times of old; or of the golden coffin of its young hero, who emulated being a god; of its streets, two thousand feet in width; and its Pharos, whose mirrors of polished steel reflected from afar the galleys of Cleopatra. Suez, with its mosques and caravansaries, its houses of sun-bricks, amid, or rather bordering on, a desert of rock, slightly covered with sand, and where trees, gardens, and meadows are almost entirely unknown, was soon left behind as the train bore them on by Shalouffe, Geneffe, Faïd, Serapium, and Nefishe, to Ismailia, so named after Ismail Pasha, and which deems itself the most aristocratic or respectable place upon the canal, as the Khedive erected a palace for himself at the east end of it, and the houses have all a substantial appearance, with neat and trim gardens; and the appearance of its harbour reminded Lord Aberfeldie of that of Balaclava in the time of the Crimean War; and still the Lake of Timsah was crowded with vessels of all sorts and sizes.

Despite the deep and keen interest of the matter nearest their hearts—the object which had brought them so far from

home—it was impossible for Olive and Eveline not to be occasionally drawn from their own thoughts, and impressed by the novelty of the new sights, scenes, and certain memories of the land they looked on ; for the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel took place somewhere near where Ismailia stands, and certain it is that, at no great distance therefrom, it was at El-Khantara-el-Khazneh, the Virgin Mother and the Holy Child passed when Joseph arose by night ‘and departed into Egypt.’ The wide lake looked now like a land-locked harbour crowded with shipping. Great steamers, magnificent ‘troopers,’ all painted white, colossal men-of-war, lay like leviathans there, while gunboats, launches, and steam tugs were for ever shooting to and fro. In the streets invalid soldiers of every kind, in tattered *karkee* uniforms or red serges, Guardsmen, Highlanders, Dragoons, Artillery, and Rifles, were creeping about, some propped on sticks and crutches, awaiting their transmission home ; and there, too, might be seen, occasionally, stalwart Bedouins, dirty Jews, and sable negroes, howling Dervishes, and many breeds of Arabs, Italians, and Frenchmen ; the Turk, with his smart scarlet fez ; the Egyptian, with tarboosh and a turban twisted round it ; and in some instances Moors, with embroidered jackets, white turban, crimson sash, and trousered to the knee, with yellow shoes, a scimitar and antique gun of enormous length ; and, though last, not least, the English Jack-tar, rollicking about, and eyeing curiously the closely veiled women.

The novelty of these sights and scenes in the minds of Olive and Eveline became merged at last, especially when they saw our wounded redcoats and bluejackets, in absorption about Allan, who, dead or alive, was then in that place, Ismailia.

And, in dread of the tidings that might await her, Olive already began to pray and wrestle, as it were, with anticipated despair and dread of how Allan, if in life, might receive her. Until *now* this idea had never occurred to her.

‘Oh, my lost love—my lost love!’ she whispered to herself; ‘what shall I say or do to convince you that I love you, and you only? If gone—oh, my God!—no, no, *no*—but if gone, I cannot call you back to me—and I cannot go to you. In another hour we shall know all—all!’

Aware, as an old Crimean campaigner, that shocking scenes might meet their eyes in the vicinity of a military hospital, Lord Aberfeldie took the three ladies of his party to the chief hotel, and then, with a heart full of the liveliest anxiety, set forth to make inquiries about Allan, to whom we shall now return.

CHAPTER LII.—AT ISMAILIA.

THE putrid water he had drunk on many occasions, the stone-fruit on which he had been compelled to feed, the damp sand on which he had lain under the night dews—the watching, fatigue, and depression of spirits he had undergone—had served to prostrate Allan now, and even his magnificent constitution failed to resist such a combination of evils. At times he was in a burning fever; at others in cold shivering fits, as if his limbs would go to pieces. These were succeeded by feeble listlessness and indifference to all around him, and then he seemed as if about to die.

He first became quite conscious of where he was on being roused from a species of waking dose by voices near him.

‘Captain,’ said an Irish Fusilier, one of Sir Garnet’s own, ‘I want ten shillings from you.’

‘For what purpose?’ asked the officer sharply.

‘To bury my brother.’

‘Bury your brother, d—n it! I gave you ten shillings for that purpose two days ago.’

‘To bury his leg that was, your honour.’

‘Well!’

‘And now I want another ten shillings to bury the rest of him.’

‘Have you a non-commissioned officer with you?’

‘Yes, sir—Sergeant Carey.’

‘Well, you and Sergeant Carey had better be off, or I’ll make the place too hot for you. As for your brother, you can bury him for nothing beside the tent-pegs outside.’

Every other morning some poor fellow was reported as dead in the wards, and they were buried in a little strip of ground near the canal, a tent-peg, with a label fluttering from it, alone indicated, in the meantime, the name and rank of the deceased.

As Allan glanced around him, he saw cheeks that were pale, eyes that were sunk, and forms emaciated by wounds, loss of blood, and fever like his own of the worst enteric form.

A somewhat oppressive odour of hot soup and poultices seemed to pervade the wards of the hastily improvised hospital, where, though wounds were dressed on Lister’s anti-septic system, with a care and minuteness never before seen on a large scale in war, yet it was reported, and with justice, in the public prints, that through the meanness, economy, and incapacity of the Government or the Government officials, ‘the enormous hospital at Ismailia was opened without drugs, instruments, provisions, or stores, and was unable to supply the front with any medical essentials, and that there was also an extraordinary lack of hospital attendants. Officers who lay in the wards tell stories which are ludicrous though painful, of neglect and want of common food. All acknowledged themselves grateful for the kindness, sympathy, and skill of the doctors. The fault was not theirs; but *red-tape* finished what *incompetence* began.’

As Allan looked around him, a familiar figure in the undress uniform of the Black Watch caught his eye—it was that of an officer conversing in a low voice with one of the staff-surgeons, and he gave a nervous start as he muttered and closed his eyes.

‘It is a chance likeness, and the world is full of chance likenesses.’

He looked again ; the figure—the man was still there, and he could see his full face now, with its light brown moustache and head of close-clipped golden hair.

‘Great Heavens, it is a day-dream of Evan Cameron !’ said Allan to himself in a whisper.

The blood in his veins seemed to congeal or to circulate like water that was icy cold. He had heard that we cannot look upon the supernatural and live, and so Allan believed that his hour had come.

Feeling that it might be only a powerful but optical illusion, he continued to gaze at the figure with incredulity and awful dread.

‘Cameron !’

The name escaped him, while a strange sensation crept over Allan, and his voice as he spoke sounded thick in his own ears. But it was no optical illusion — no disembodied spirit he saw, as he thought he had done before, but his friend and comrade still in the body, but pale now and barely convalescent after the dreadful wound he had received. He grasped the hand of Allan, and laughed at the mingled expression of blank amazement and dismay he read there, emotions which were gradually replaced by those of satisfaction and delight.

‘I was supposed to be dead and buried in the sand, like Lieutenant O’Brien in “Peter Simple,” but, unlike Lieutenant O’Brien, I was not discovered by a pretty girl treading on my nose,’ said Cameron, laughing, and in reply to some inarticulate words of Allan, on the side of whose bed he seated himself.

‘Tell me—tell me about it,’ said Allan huskily.

‘You could scarcely have left me ere I began to recover from the syncope—for a syncope it was—only you and Sergeant Farquharson were not doctors enough to discover that it was so. A sense of suffocation made me struggle up and throw off

my blanket and the covering of light sand in which you had so kindly tucked me ; and as the blanket fell from my face the dew refreshed me, and I perceived in a moment the fatal mistake into which you had all fallen. Dark though it was, the detachment was still in sight, and I could hear your voices. I tried to call out, but lacked the power to do so, and a horror fell upon me, with insensibility after a time, and, when I recovered, I found a group of mounted Bedouins gazing at me in stupid wonder to see a living man half buried in the sand.'

'But how was it that we totally failed to find all trace of the spot where we interred you?'

'How strange the question sounds as you frame it,' said Cameron, smiling. 'A sandstorm came on, and must have obliterated the landmarks.'

'We heard shots as we fell back.'

'The Bedouins fired at something—I know not what. They proved to belong to a friendly tribe—Bedouins of that kind who become petty merchants wandering over the country, trading in such goods as they can easily transport from place to place, and fortunate—most fortunate—was it for me that I fell just then into the hands of men so peacefully disposed.'

'And your wound?'

'Is healing fast, thank Heaven ! They carefully redressed it, put me in a camel litter, and conveyed me to Abu Zabel on the canal, from whence I was sent, with others here, by boat to Ismailia on sick-leave for home. I heard of your having been carried off at Matarieh ; some of our fellows who are in the wards told me so ; but I was powerless to attempt your discovery in any way—too feeble almost to think, but the idea of your peril and too probably helpless butchery cut me to the heart.'

'Any news from home?'

'Home?' repeated Cameron.

'I mean of my people.'

'None, Allan, how should I hear of them?'

‘True,’ said Allan, wearily and sadly, and in the miserable weakness of his body, as a paroxysm of shivering came over him, almost doubting the evidence of his own senses.

Hawke Holcroft had turned up in the camp of Zeid-el-Ourdeh—that was startling enough in all conscience ; but that Evan Cameron, whom he and Sergeant Farquharson had so regretfully buried in the sandy grave—the grave of which no trace could be found—should be alive, well, and chatting with him there, and manipulating a cigar, outheroed fiction !

The wonderful reappearance of the supposed dead Cameron was the intelligence in the papers which Olive Raymond and Eveline did *not* see. Little could Cameron imagine that Eveline was so near to him as she was then !

Often had he dreamt of her face—not when he longed to do so, but when visions of it came upon him unbidden while he lay asleep on the deck of the transport, in the bivouacs in the desert, amid the wards of the hospital at Ismailia and elsewhere, and it always came before him with a sweetness, a loving expression, and a strange spiritual charm impossible to define or describe.

After the mutual revelations of the two friends, the intermittent fever of Allan seemed to become more deadly, and by the time that Lord Aberfeldie arrived at the hospital he almost failed to recognise his son, so much had the latter sunk ; for, the temporary excitement consequent to the meeting with Cameron having subsided, Allan’s health seemed visibly to retrograde, and each fit of shivering rendered him weaker than the last.

A staff-surgeon had prepared Allan for the visit of his father, who was manifestly shocked when he saw how prostrate he was, and, as they pressed each other’s hands, Lord Aberfeldie perceived how thin, bony, and wasted those of his son had become.

‘My poor boy,’ he exclaimed ; ‘how is this I find you ?’

‘Not dying, father, but very near it, I fear,’ replied Allan with a sickly smile.

Lord Aberfeldie gazed lovingly and sadly into his son’s wasted face, and thought of all his mother, his sister, and Olive would feel on seeing him thus, and in such a squalid place. Amid the suffering and misery they were enduring, Lord Aberfeldie thought it strange to hear many expressing regret that the war was over so soon, and ‘Arabi snuffed out.’

The realization of Sir Garnet Wolseley’s confident prediction that all would be ended by the 16th of September, put an abrupt and speedy end to all chances of promotion and glory, and now everyone thought only of going home as fast as possible.

In the huge improvised military hospital much existed, as in every such place, that proved rather repugnant to the ideas of a fastidious man, so Lord Aberfeldie resolved upon having Allan removed to another place—a hotel or villa—whither, when the surgeon would permit it, he would have him conveyed by soldiers in a dhooley; and, full of this purpose, he rejoined the ladies, who awaited his return with the keenest anxiety. His hopes of Allan’s recovery proved balm to their hearts, though he spoke more confidently of it than his own observations warranted. At the story of Cameron, Eveline sprang from her seat, while a little gasping cry escaped her, and Lord Aberfeldie was rather sorry to see her mother’s face darken.

‘Evan Cameron—Evan Cameron alive!’ exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie incredulously.

‘Alive and well! Old Stratherroch, his father, used to say that the men of the Black Watch were deuced hard to kill, and, by Jove! he was right. For the old man’s sake, I am glad that God has spared the boy!’

Unable to realize the situation, poor Eveline felt stupefied!

CHAPTER LIII.—CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE.

OLIVE heard all her uncle had to relate of the condition in which he found Allan, and, stealing away, she assumed her hat and sunshade, and, accompanied by Clairette, undeterred by any risks she might run in a strange place, issued into the somewhat European-looking streets of Ismailia, over which she could see the great palace of the Khedive looming in the distance, about two miles off; and obtaining the guidance of a passing soldier—a Seaforth Highlander—she bent her steps direct to the military hospital.

In the depth of her love, in the keenness of her anxiety—her remorse, too, for all she had, in some sense unwittingly, made Allan endure—she cast the idea of strict propriety and the amenities of society to the winds, and, following the generous impulses of her own heart, resolved to see Allan, if she could, without delay. She passed the temporary burying-ground, with its row of labelled tent-pegs, without a shudder, as she knew not what lay there; anon past wards where lay patients suffering from sunstroke and ophthalmia, as she could see by the sufferers wearing blue veils and dark glasses, till she was ushered into a species of office, where a staff-surgeon in undress uniform greeted her with some surprise and *empressement*. He had not seen an English girl—especially one of Olive's style and beauty—for a considerable time past, perhaps, and he looked with genuine interest on Olive, her half-opened mouth, her soft, earnest eyes, her trembling lips, and the tears that clung to her long lashes.

Shyly she asked if it were possible to see Captain Graham, of the Black Watch, who was a patient. He smiled, and shook his head.

'Do permit me, sir,' she asked, with half-clasped hands and her eyes full of entreaty.

'Do be reasonable, Miss—Raymond,' said he, glancing at

her card, which an orderly had given him. 'Your presence would but excite him too much. It will be folly on your part to undo all our precautions simply from a mere desire, however natural, to speak with or see Captain Graham.'

'Oh, sir, if you knew all !'

'All that can be done for him is being done. Besides, there is danger in being near him.'

'Danger !'

'To you.'

'I care not. Why ?'

'Enteric fever takes a typhoid form at times.'

'Fear not for me—I am his cousin—his promised wife?' urged Olive piteously.

'Come with me, then, but softly ; this way,' said the surgeon, and, taking her hand, he led her across a corridor, where hospital orderlies, men of the Army Hospital Corps, nurses, and others were hovering, and where Olive narrowly escaped the shock of seeing a fever-stricken and attenuated corpse carried out, and into a plain, whitewashed room, where on a camp-bed—one of those brought from Arabi's camp—Allan lay asleep.

Olive, in obedience to a mute sign from the doctor, made no nearer approach, or attempt to touch or wake him, but she restrained her heavy sobs with difficulty, for the sight of how wan and worn, hollowed-cheeked, and pale he was, and how every way wasted, wrung her loving heart to the core.

Kneeling down by his bedside, she lightly touched with her lips his thin white hand that lay upon the coverlit, a mute action which, in one so charming as she looked, stirred even the heart of the staff-surgeon, and then she stole softly away.

'Is there any hope ?' she asked, in a choking voice.

As the doctor did not speak, she looked in his face and seemed to see her answer there.

‘He cannot recover, you fear?’ said she.

‘I fear not, Miss Raymond,’ said the doctor, in a low voice.

She leant for a moment against the table, and felt giddy. Then, bowing to the staff-surgeon, she drew her veil close over her face, took the arm of Clairette to steady her footsteps, and quitted the sad place in a tumult of grief and horror. Night came on—the hot Egyptian night—and Allan as he tossed restlessly on his pillow, all unconscious of *who* had visited him, as he looked wearily round his bare and strange-like apartment by the subdued light of a shaded lamp, pondered doubtfully whether it had been a dream or a reality that he had that forenoon spoken with and seen his father, Lord Aberfeldie, and, in the weakness and confusion of his mind, he was somewhat inclined to think the whole thing was the effect of fevered fancy. Ere long Olive was to have him all to herself!

In a beautiful little villa near the Lake of Timsah—one built for the famous Toulba Pasha, the friend of Arabi—in view of all the fleet that lay anchored there, Allan, after a little time, found himself in a luxurious apartment, furnished in European style, yet fitted up and decorated in the Egyptian manner, with gaily painted arabesques. The windows opened upon an arcaded veranda, the slender pillars of which were rose-coloured marble, with quaint capitals of purest alabaster, from which sprung horse-shoe arches elaborately carved and inscribed with verses from the Koran.

Palm-trees, feathery-branched bananas, and arched rows of orange-trees shaded the lovely garden walks, all mosaic with polished pebbles; and there, amid the rose-trees and beds of tulip bordered by myrtle, a white marble fountain spouted, the very plash of its ceaselessly falling water seeming to cool the heated air; and, in view of all this, Allan Graham lay on his couch in the care of his mother and sister, but more often with Olive alone, for she had constituted herself by right his nurse,

and ere long Eveline found a sufficient occupation for herself. How, the reader may guess.

As for Allan and Olive, their reconciliation came speedily about, as such things never take long in real life if they are to take place at all ; and the few minutes that followed are not very describable, as they remained, hand clasped in hand, in silence, but with a happiness and content that were inexpressible—‘one of those rare periods in life when we forget our mortality and believe that heaven has begun for us.’

At first Allan, fearful of some infectious nature in his ailment, had implored Olive to leave him.

‘Go—go, Olive!’ he exclaimed faintly ; ‘do not come near me!’

‘You dislike me so—so much?’ said Olive, more faintly still.

‘Oh no, oh no—not that, not that, when I now know all.’

‘Why, then, Allan?’

‘Because all the doctors tell me that there is something typhoid in this Egyptian enteric fever, and if it were to affect you——’

‘Allan!’ she exclaimed reproachfully ; and, pressing her lips to his, added, ‘if you die, let me die too.’

‘Olive!’

‘Do you doubt me now?’

‘Oh no—oh no, my darling ; but do leave me.’

‘Why?’

‘Because this sick-room is no place for you.’

But Olive in the depth of her love was resolute, and kept her place as a watcher by his pillow, and day after day, with only short intervals of rest, was she there unvaryingly ; and as she bent over Allan’s sick-bed she felt how true it is that ‘all the forces of our nature rush towards the channels of pity, of patience, and of love, and sweep down the choking drift of our quarrels, our debates, our would-be wisdom, and our clamorous, selfish desires.’

Allan's life was for a time hovering in the balance, and Olive, as she sat by his pillow looking out on the Lake of Tim-sah, recalled the pleasant days of their childhood at Dundargue, where they had plaited rushes beside the trouting stream, and he had garlanded her hair with scarlet poppies and yellow cow-slips, and he used to call her his little queen and wifie, while the great clouds cast their flying shadows over the green Sidlaw hills and the bonnie Carse of Gowrie.

‘Days gone beyond recall, save in memory!’

But, when she feared he might be going out from her sight for ever, her heart grew cold and seemed to die within her.

She watched him when he lay motionless and asleep, when his irregular breathing stirred his sun-burned throat and broad chest, when the perspiration of fever rolled in globules over his forehead, and when the cold shivering of the ague followed, till, by watching and confinement, her cheek grew pale as Allen's.

There was always a profound and oppressive stillness about the house and room. She heard no sound but his breathing and the ticking of a French clock upon a console-table. Her hand it was that was ever ready to give the compounded drinks the doctor ordered, and when ere long he became convalescent, to her joy, she accompanied him in his drives around Ismailia, to Nefische and Serapium, and along the banks of the Great Bitter Lake, where the lofty white Indian ‘troopers’ could be seen under steam, and boats like those that are to be seen on the Nile at Cairo in hundreds—elegant barques with long sail-yards and fantastic canvas that fly with wonderful velocity, and are so ingeniously carved and painted, fitted up with carpeted cabins, and deck-awnings of brilliant colours as a protection from the heat.

So the days stole on, and, as Allan's fever seemed to pass away, he and Olive became supremely happy—she all the more so that she had been his chief nurse. ‘Nothing,’ says a writer,

'tones down a young girl's passion into apparent friendship like nursing the man she loves in illness. Of course, it is there, ready to break out with the old strength hereafter; but for the time the sense of utter weakness on his side, of protection on hers—the perfect unquestioned familiarity, the constant companionship—have done away with all the old reserve and doubt and mystery which to unsophisticated young women is the very food of love.' We have said that while all this was in progress Eveline had found an occupation for herself. It was very natural that Evan Cameron should call at the villa by the Lake of Timsah to inquire for his friend and comrade, and it was also natural that he should meet, incidentally, Lady Puddicombe, which event came to pass on the very day that Lord and Lady Aberfeldie had taken the train to Grand Cairo, to be present at the St. Andrew Festival, held by the Highland Brigade in the magnificent restaurant in the Ezeb Keyah Gardens.

Evan was suddenly ushered in upon her by old Mr. Tappleton, the butler, who had charge of the household at Ismailia, and whose rubicund face became quite radiant when he saw the familiar uniform of the Black Watch. A little cap of snowy-white lace rested on her soft brown hair; all the rich beauty promised but a short time ago had been amply fulfilled, amid the sorrow she had endured, or in the dignity of her girlish widowhood.

A film seemed to pass over Evan's handsome eyes; a tremulous sensation, hitherto unknown, seemed to thrill over his nerves, and he was for a moment more full of emotion than herself; but he did not, as she expected, hasten to take her in his arms.

'Lady Puddicombe!' he exclaimed, while playing irresolutely with the red hackle in his tropical helmet.

'I am not the wife of Sir Paget now,' said Eveline sweetly and simply.

'What then?'

‘His widow. Is it possible you did not know?’

‘He is—dead then!’

‘Yes, Evan—killed by a fall from a horse. I am in weeds, don’t you see?’

And, if a tearless, a very peerless little widow she looked.

Then a half-stifled cry escaped her as she fell upon his breast, and her white hands groped feebly, as one might do in the dark, about his shoulders, as her arms sought to go round his neck. In her crape dress she seemed to appeal to him and to his tenderness more eloquently than she had ever done in the past time, and he gazed into her delicate face, as he took it caressingly between his hands, with a growing intensity that showed how he had hungered for the sight of it. The first strong tide of emotion swept over that parted pair, meeting now so differently from how they had ever expected to meet again.

In the intensity of her joy, Eveline had closed her eyes, as if the light of day had proved too much for them; then their long lashes began to quiver, the lids unclosed, and the dear eyes were again turned wonderingly, searchingly, and lovingly on Evan Cameron’s face.

She was *free*.

His pulses quickened at the thought. He had never ceased to love her—never ceased to wish she should be his. Sir Paget was dead—dead as Julius Cæsar—and he—Evan Cameron, had been in possession of a treasure without knowing it—the free and unfettered love of Eveline!

‘Dead fires are difficult to relight,’ said she waggishly, while twirling the ends of his moustache with her fairy fingers.

‘But, Eveline, with me the fire was never dead: as I loved you with a love that partook of adoration in the dear past days at Dundargue, so I love you still!’

‘My poor, dear Evan!’ cooed the girl.

‘Yes—poor indeed—without you.’

So true it was that 'the thing we look forward to,' as George Eliot says, 'often comes to pass; but never precisely as we have imagined it to ourselves.'

Could Eveline have ever looked forward to this when at Hurdell Hall—to see Evan Cameron in life again, and feel his tender kisses on her lips and eyes?

Evan had loved Eveline as a maiden; he had trained himself to suffer, endure, and think of her as a wife; but now he thanked God that he had not to think of her as a mother—the mother of a wretched little Puddicombe!

Lady Aberfeldie, who had fresh views concerning her daughter, was somewhat irate when—on her return from the city of the Caliphs and Khedives—the latter, with perfect deliberation, informed her that Evan Cameron had been at the villa to see Allan, and had paid *her* a long visit.

'He spoke of his old fancy for you, no doubt?' said Lady Aberfeldie rather freezingly.

'He did, mamma,' was the candid reply.

'He had not the hardihood to ask you to marry him?'

'Mamma!'

'Already—I mean.'

'Of course not.'

'But I suppose he will presume to do so in time?'

'I have no doubt of it, dearest mamma,' replied Eveline, attempting to kiss her; but my Lady Aberfeldie was in no fit of effusion, and coldly tendered her cheek. 'Was not his escape miraculous, mamma?'

'I admit that it was; and now——'

'Just learn this, dearest mamma. I married a short time ago to please you, and, now that God in His goodness has spared and restored Evan to me, I shall marry next to please myself.'

'It is very strange how some girls get it into their head that there is a special virtue in a man because he is poor.'

'Evan isn't poor now,' replied Eveline stoutly. 'Stratherroch is nearly free, and, if it were not, I have enough for two.'

'Your jointure dies with you,' said Lady Aberfeldie sourly.

'Dear Evan will never think of that, mamma; and long before *that* day comes every acre, every tuft of heather in Stratherroch will be disencumbered and free.'

'You have schemed out the whole programme. But as your father's daughter, and the widow of Sir Paget Puddicombe, Baronet, you are entitled to look higher.'

'I don't want to do so, mamma,' said Eveline coyly and laughingly; 'you see, it is only a case of "heaping up riches, and ye know not who shall gather them."'

Eveline was in a kind of triumphant and defiant mood, such as her mother had never seen her in before, for she added, 'The whirligig of time brings curious things to pass, so Lady Puddicombe will be Mrs. Cameron of Stratherroch after all.'

So the days stole on pleasantly by the Lake of Timsah. Allan grew well rapidly, and, now that she was free and under better auspices, Evan Cameron daily discovered in Eveline some new trait of character that rendered her more worthy of his love and esteem—or indicative that those qualities of passion and tenderness that first excited his interest in her had ripened under all she had undergone—the sorrow and separation that had tried and purified their mutual love as gold is tried by fire.

We have said that the reconciliation of Allan and Olive came about, and rapidly too.

'Only love me, Allan,' whispered the girl, as she nestled her sweet face in his neck; 'only love me as you did in the old days at Dundargue, and I shall be so happy. Without your love I could not live.'

'By your strange actions you destroyed my faith in you, darling—and yet I loved you still. Oh, think over it all, and consider if you did not try me sorely, for there was a powerful appearance of deception that was unworthy of us both.'

Her beautiful eyes were moist with tears ; her hands stole into his, and he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately, while a torrent of thankfulness and joy overwhelmed her heart.

‘And so that wretched photo was the key to your apparently inexplicable conduct?’

‘Yes,’ replied Olive, weeping, while Allan kissed away her tears.

‘Why did you not confide freely in me?’

‘I was too terrified—too mortified to do so, and you were so proud, so suspicious of me. I writhed in secret under the imputation that that man had it in his power to cast upon me with the tampered miniature. I was weak, foolish, Allan, and every act of mine seemed to be a mistake and misplaced ; but now——’

‘All is over, and all forgotten.’

‘Thank Heaven for its goodness, Allan. You never wrote to me after that parting at Southsea. Save in your letter to your mother after Tel-el-Kebir, you never once referred to me, and then only in terms of scorn and invective. Oh, Allan, Allan, all that was very hard to bear!’

But Allan found ample means of consoling her now.

‘How happy I am!’ said Lady Aberfeldie, as she nestled both their heads together on her motherly breast. ‘Ever since you two were little children, how I prayed for this! I reared and taught you to this end, and God has seen fit in His goodness to accomplish it!’

And now, having brought our ‘heroes and heroines,’ to use the old novelist’s phraseology, to this point, need we follow them into the region of wedding-bells, wedding-cakes, favours, rice, and old slippers?

We think not.

THE END.

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